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FEBRUARY 9, 2015

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AND THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

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—"How Mozilla Lost Its C.E.O.,"
James Surowiecki

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POETRY: Readings by Robert Pinsky and Stephen Dunn.

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THE MAIL

INVESTING IN HEALTH

Luke Mogelson, in his article on the Ebola crisis in West Africa, writes that an earlier, "more robust and better-organized international response" could have contained the initial outbreak before it spread from remote rural areas to crowded cities ("When the Fever Breaks," January 19th). A robust response is still urgently needed, not only to insure that the waning epidemic does not reignite but also to prevent future crises of this magnitude. As the article points out, every known outbreak of Ebola started in a remote locale. Greater long-term investment in agricultural and rural development—from seeds and fertilizer for small-scale farmers to credit and training for micro-entrepreneurs—could have raised the standard of living and health services in the communities where Ebola struck first. Mogelson's reporting vividly illustrates the way people across West Africa have seized control of their destiny by intervening to isolate the Ebola virus and slow its spread. The world should support these efforts by rebuilding weakened food systems in the region and investing seriously in thriving rural communities that offer hope and health for future generations.

*Dr. Kanayo F. Nwanze
President, United Nations
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DEEPER EMOTION

Raffi Khatchadourian's article about Affectiva and the business of computers reading emotions addressed an exciting area of contemporary research ("We Know How You Feel," January 19th). As a graduate student in social psychology who studies emotion, I found that many of the questions that motivate Affectiva's research overlap with my own. While the automated recognition of facial expressions has advanced significantly in the past few decades, it is important not to overstate what affective computing contributes to the scientific study of emo-

tion. Connecting preferences with facial expressions is not the same as connecting those same facial expressions with underlying brain processes and internal states. Rana el Kaliouby is careful to insist that her technology does not read minds. Affective computing will play an integral role in discoveries concerning the nature of emotion, but much work remains.

*Jared Martin
Madison, Wis.*

CORRUPTION IN KABUL

I read Patrick Keefe's piece on graft with interest ("Corruption and Revolt," January 19th). In the early sixties, I drove across the border into Herat from Mashhad in an old Land Rover with two kayaks strapped to the roof. My group's arrival was noted in our passports: a small written entry and a stamp from an embossed ring. We sold the Land Rover in Herat and made our way to Kabul on public trucks. When we arrived, and set about getting paperwork to enter Pakistan, a consular official informed us that we had to show that we had paid galactic taxes on the vehicle we brought in—which, we learned, had been marked in our passports as a helicopter. Our passports were seized. A long negotiation began, involving several embassies. The Afghan officials refused to budge, seemingly determined to collect more of the profit from our sale. We remained under house arrest until word came from our Embassy that we should appear at the government building, where we would be released. An official said, by way of explanation, "Well, you can't expect us to be monks here in government."

*John E. S. Lawrence
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•
Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter or return letters.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

FEBRUARY WEDNESDAY • THURSDAY • FRIDAY • SATURDAY • SUNDAY • MONDAY • TUESDAY
2015 4TH 5TH 6TH 7TH 8TH 9TH 10TH

ONSCREEN, IN SUCH WORKS as “Unfaithful” and “Cinema Verite,” Diane Lane has excelled at playing a dissatisfied wife whose polished glamour belies a stormy interior. Lane was born in Manhattan, but she hasn’t appeared on the New York stage since the seventies—now she stars in Bathsbeba Doran’s “The Mystery of Love & Sex,” at the Mitzi E. Newhouse, a breeding ground for dystopian family dramas with enough wit and bite to please the discerning matinee crowd, and, sometimes, to transfer to Broadway. Lane and the seasoned stage actor Tony Shalhoub (above) play the parents of Charlotte (Gayle Rankin, memorable in “Cabaret” as a magnetically insouciant, androgynous chorus member), whose confusion about her sexual identity and her new romance with her childhood friend Jonny (Mamoudou Athie) cause familial turmoil. The very busy Sam Gold directs.

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 Laura Pels

IT'S ONLY A PLAY
 Jacobs

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MATILDA THE MUSICAL
 Shubert

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 Abrons Arts Center

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 Pershing Square Signature Center

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 Claire Tow

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OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Big Love

Charles Mee wrote this play, a remake of Aeschylus' "The Danaids," in which fifty brides leave their fifty grooms and repair to an Italian villa. Tina Landau directs the Signature Theatre Company production. In previews. (Pershing Square Signature Center, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

Hamilton

Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote this musical about Alexander Hamilton, in which the birth of America is presented as an immigrant story. Thomas Kail directs. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

The Iceman Cometh

Robert Falls directs Nathan Lane and Brian Dennehy in the Eugene O'Neill masterwork from 1939, in a Goodman Theatre production. The play is set around the characters—anarchists, salesmen, prostitutes, alcoholics—who frequent a Greenwich Village saloon and rooming house in 1912. Previews begin Feb. 5. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

Lady, Be Good!

"Encores!" begins its season with this 1924 musical with music by George Gershwin, lyrics by Ira Gershwin, and a book by Guy Bolton and Fred Thompson. Tommy Tune is a special guest. Feb. 4-8. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

The Lion

Benjamin Scheuer wrote and performs this solo show, which premiered at Manhattan Theatre Club last year. In previews. Opens Feb. 8. (Lynn Redgrave Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 866-811-4111.)

Lives of the Saints

Primary Stages presents this new collection of short comedies by David Ives, directed by John Rando. In previews. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

The Mystery of Love & Sex

Bathsheba Doran ("Kin") wrote this play, about two childhood friends who begin a romance in college. Starring Diane Lane, Tony Shalhoub, Mamoudou Athie, Bernie Passeltnier, and Gayle Rankin. Sam Gold directs the Lincoln Center Theatre production. Previews begin Feb. 5. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Nether

MCC presents a psychological thriller by Jennifer Haley, about a dangerously addictive online world, starring Merritt Wever, Peter Friedman, Ben Rosenfield, and Frank Wood. Anne Kauffman directs. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-352-3101.)

The World of Extreme Happiness

Manhattan Theatre Club presents a co-production with the Goodman

Theatre, the world premiere of a play by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig, about a young woman who leaves rural China for the big city, only to have her eyes opened to a corrupt bureaucracy. Eric Ting directs. In previews. (City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

NOW PLAYING

The Golden Toad

This three-hour-plus Talking Band production is made up of four connected episodes, written by the Talking Band veterans Paul Zimet and Ellen Maddow, each of which takes place in a different section of La Mama's cavernous Ellen Stewart Theatre. The entire cycle, directed by Zimet, covers several years in the lives of six people—a gay couple (James Tigger! Ferguson and Mikeah Ernest Jennings) and their adopted daughter (Helen Gutowski), two old ladies (Maddow and Tina Shepard), and a lost young man (Nicolas Norena)—who struggle with one another when they first meet, in a Brooklyn apartment house in 2006, but eventually become very close. Though this ragtag ensemble works hard, much of the dialogue is wooden, a lot of the acting is schtick, and the whole thing goes on for way too long, including, in the third hour, a set of uninspired karaoke. (66 E. 4th St. 646-430-5374. Through Feb. 7.)

The Human Symphony

In this unique theatrical experience, created by Dylan Marron and produced by the New York Neo-Futurists, six willing audience members are brought onstage and given headsets, through which they're directed to perform simple tasks—stand up and face one another, smile, hold hands and skip across the stage. Recordings of people talking about their experiences with online dating are played overhead. Initially, it's interesting and mildly funny to see how cooperatively non-actors follow instructions in front of an audience: in no time, the participants find themselves dancing, hugging, and pretending to have anal sex by jumping up and down. After a while, though, non-participating audience members long for a less superficial subject, and for some real acting. (New Ohio Theatre, 154 Christopher St. 888-596-1027.)

Let the Right One In

John Tiffany directs the National Theatre of Scotland's production of the love story between an outcast boy and the vampire girl next door. With choreography by Steven Hoggett. (Reviewed in this issue.) (St. Ann's Warehouse, 29 Jay St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

Nevermore—The Imaginary Life and Mysterious Death of

Edgar Allan Poe

The Canadian playwright, composer, and director Jonathan Christenson imagines the life of the nineteenth-century American writer to be characterized by Dickensian loss and grief. Poe's alcoholic father abandoned his family when Poe (Scott Shepley) was a little boy, after which his beloved mother died, his brother and sister were sent away, his foster mother went mad, his fiancée left him for another man, and his wife succumbed to illness. This tale of woe is conveyed through monotonous song-and-dance numbers by actors playing harsh, cartoonish characters dressed in black, white, and gray. Judging from his writing, much more went into Poe's genius than the dark, difficult life that is too broadly drawn here. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

The Road to Damascus

The playwright Tom Dulack has a way with geography. His brainy, preposterous, and intermittently gripping play hopscoches adroitly from D.C. to Rome to Damascus. The director Michael Parva has staged this speculative drama at 59E59, not a mile from where a terrorist's bomb explodes in the play's first scene. The attack sets off an international crisis, and Dexter Hobbhouse, a flailing diplomat with a tenuous connection to the curia, is charged with traveling to the Vatican and convincing Pope Augustine, the first African Pontiff, not to interfere in America's retaliation. Dulack's strengths—plot and argument—are novelistic rather than theatrical. There is plenty of double-talk, double-dealing, and clandestine missions, but, with the exception of Hobbhouse (Rufus Collins), a career no-hoper angling for his fourth marriage, none of the characters are particularly plausible or compelling. (59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

Shesh Yak

At first, Jameel (Zarif Kabier), a thirtyish-year-old Syrian-American, seems mild-mannered, harried by his mother's calls from Damascus nagging him to find a wife. When he welcomes a houseguest, an acquaintance named Haytham (Laith Nakli), they swap stories over tea about life back in Syria; they're both anti-regime. Then the plot swerves: Jameel, turning vengeful, drugs Haytham and ties him to a chair. It's only a matter of time, we realize, before some long-ago atrocity is unfurled. Nakli, who wrote this eighty-minute drama (directed by Bruce McCarty), does an admirable job of making the horrific headlines feel local and immediate. But the interrogation setup smacks of TV procedurals, and Kabier lards his portrayal with too much sadistic cackling. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 866-811-4111.)

ART

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Madame Cézanne." Through March 15.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World." Through April 5.

MOMA PSI

"Wael Shawky: Cabaret Crusades." Through Aug. 31.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"On Kawara—Silence." Opens Feb. 9.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Judith Scott: Bound and Unbound." Through March 29.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

"Nature's Fury: The Science of Natural Disasters." Through Aug. 9.

AMERICAN FOLK ART MUSEUM

"A Shared Legacy: Folk Art in America." Through March 8.

JEWISH MUSEUM

"Helena Rubinstein: Beauty Is Power." Through March 22.

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

"Exploring France: Oil Sketches from the Thaw Collection." Through Oct. 4.

SCULPTURECENTER

"Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook." Through March 30.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

New-York Historical Society

"Freedom Journey 1965: Photographs of the Selma to Montgomery March by Stephen Somerstein"

As the photo editor of the City College of New York student newspaper, Somerstein was not among the great photographers who regularly covered the civil-rights beat. But when he travelled to Alabama to document one of the movement's turning points, the pictures he brought back were remarkable. In the most memorable, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s head is seen from behind as he addresses the crowd in Montgomery. (An altered version appears on the poster for Ava DuVernay's movie "Selma.") There are also striking images here of James Baldwin, Rosa Parks, Bayard Rustin, and others, but the observant Somerstein's best photographs are of the crowds on the sidelines of the march, where sympathetic spectators outnumbered hecklers and goons. Their expressions of amazement and concern reflect the soulful quality of Somerstein's own role as history's witness. Through April 19.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Josef Koudelka

In a dark room, a video reminds viewers that this great Czech photographer is most famous for his pictures of the resistance to the Soviet invasion of Prague, in 1968, and for his engaging images of Gypsies in Romania. Twelve black-and-white panoramas—unpopulated landscapes, each more than eight feet long—occupy the rest of the show. Koudelka's subject is ruins, both ancient and modern, in Europe and the Middle East, including a

number of abandoned industrial sites. Dramatic and desolate, the pictures hit an emotional pitch that's almost operatic; enlarged even more, they'd make great backdrops for Wagner's Ring Cycle. Through Feb. 14. (Pace, 508 W. 25th St. 212-255-4044.)

Mike Nelson

Pass through two ramshackle saloon-style wooden doors, and you'll encounter a group of precarious, occasionally anthropomorphic totems made of tires, rocks, fabric, and chicken wire. The flotsam and driftwood come from Canada's northwest coast, but local culture is not the point here; the slapdash forms of Nelson's assemblages are intended to suggest a post-apocalyptic attempt to bring order to chaos after ecological disaster has struck. The British artist indulges in a few inside jokes: a wall-mounted trucker hat with its plastic snaps extended outwards winks at Picasso's bull's head made from a bicycle seat. In lesser hands, the joke would feel glib; in Nelson's, it turns dark and virtuosic. Through Feb. 21. (303 Gallery, 507 W. 24th St. 212-255-1121.)

Assaf Shaham

Photographs, videos, and a few small sculptures by the young Israeli artist tackle familiar issues of perception and reality with varying degrees of wit and originality. Conceptual one-liners—the digital displays on vintage calculators spell out the words "hell" and "hole"—overshadow smarter but more modest pieces. Among these are Shaham's most beautiful images, made by laying office scanners on top of one another and turning them on. The results are quirky geometric abstractions, crisscrossing vibrant bands of color with solid blocks of black and white. Through Feb. 21.

(Milo, 245 Tenth Ave., at 24th St. 212-414-0370.)

Dan Walsh

A standout in last year's overcrowded Whitney Biennial, Walsh paints abstract, often square-format pictures whose fat, rounded lines are built up through methodical strokes with an extra-wide brush. Most of the meditative patterns in his new canvases have a rigorous symmetry, although in one rousing instance Walsh interrupts his five-by-five grid with simple icons: a beehive, a compass, a spiral. The palette of browns and goldenrods and the repeated motifs of squares and octagons lend some paintings the look of seventies wallpaper. But Walsh seems happily unconcerned with the old rivalry between abstraction and ornament, and his best paintings have a heft, soulfulness, and command that evokes Islamic decorative arts. Through Feb. 14. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Tyson Reeder

The always disarming Chicago dandy weaves spells with works that don't look like much at first: washy paintings (mostly landscapes) and sculptures (including minimally altered newspaper-vending boxes). A cunning sensibility simmers in Reeder's vamped-Fauvist colors—mints, pinks, lavenders—and in his just-enough tinkering. The paintings are a bit emotive and a bit hedonist—happier Munch, laid-back Bonnard—be the subject a beach at sunset or a gaudy shoe store. A battered news box, painted a sickly blue, patiently rusts itself by dribbling water from its top. It's the world's humblest fountain. Through Feb. 15. (Canada, 333 Broome St. 212-925-4631.)



After MOMA's Matisse show closes, next week, viewers still on the lookout for audacious beauty should visit Bushwick, where the American artist Philip Taaffe's enormous new paintings (including "Glyphic Field," 2014, above) are on view at the Luhring Augustine gallery through April 26.

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DESKTIMELY NOTES ON ARTS AND
ENTERTAINMENT

"If I have but one rule, it's that critics shouldn't opine on subjects they know nothing about, or use the word 'opine.'"
—"I Really Do Hate Top-Ten Lists,"
Emily Nussbaum

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Metropolitan Opera

When Bartók's sinister "Bluebeard's Castle" was last unveiled at the Metropolitan Opera, in 1989, it was as the prelude to Schoenberg's "Erwartung." Now it has returned as the postlude to the Met premiere of Tchaikovsky's "Iolanta," the composer's final opera, which debuted in 1892 as half of the most famous double bill in Russian music history, sharing the stage with "The Nutcracker." Performances of "Iolanta" will never be as commonplace as those of its celebrated sibling, but at its best the score gives off a secretive, radiant beauty that the production's stars, the soprano Anna Netrebko, the tenor Piotr Beczala, and the conductor Valery Gergiev, are well suited to exploit. Gergiev also conducts "Bluebeard," which features two estimable singers, Nadja Michael and Mikhail Petrenko; both productions are by Mariusz Treliński, the distinguished Polish director who heads the Teatr Wielki-Polish National Opera. (Feb. 7 at 8 and Feb. 10 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** The New York Philharmonic's Alan Gilbert, having earned his stripes conducting the Met premiere of John Adams's "Doctor Atomic," in 2008, walks across the plaza once again, this time to lead a repertory work: "Don Giovanni," in the adequate but stiffly conventional Michael Grandage production. Hopefully Gilbert can draw some sparks from the singers, who, in addition to the always potent Peter Mattei in the title role, include such standouts as Elza van den Heever, Emma Bell, Kate Lindsey, and Luca Pisaroni. (Feb. 4 at 7:30 and Feb. 7 at 12:30.) • The young, glamorous, and pretty-voiced tenor Vittorio Grigolo works hard to overcome type in the current revival of Offenbach's "Les Contes d'Hoffmann," plunging into the angsty world of the titular alcoholic poet with thrilling singing and impetuous charisma. Bartlett Sher's overstuffed production nonetheless tells the story of the Four Villains (a campy Thomas Hampson) and Hoffmann's Muse (the taut, transfixing Kate Lindsey) guiding the poet out of his romantic entanglements with Antonia (Hibla Gerzmava), Giulietta (Christine Rice), and Olympia (a sparkling Erin Morley) and back to his art; Yves Abel paces the opera effectively in the pit. (Feb. 5 at 7:30.) • "La Bohème" has departed for the season; "Carmen" takes its place. This revival of the Richard Eyre production offers what might be a momentous Met debut for the up-and-coming American soprano Ailyn Pérez, in the role of Micaëla. Commanding the heights, however, is Elina Garanča, as the fiery gypsy; Roberto Alagna (one of the few singers who can authentically communicate French style), as Don José; and another debutant, Gábor Bretz, as Escamillo. Mostly Mozart's Louis Langrée is on the podium. (Feb. 6 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Christopher Rouse's three-year term as the Philharmonic's composer-in-residence has been a welcome

addition to the contemporary fare of the Alan Gilbert era, which has tended toward works by (undeniably gifted) European composers—a trend that will resume when Esa-Pekka Salonen occupies the post next season. "Isariot," the final work to be showcased during Rouse's tenure, will be led by David Zinman, a distinguished longtime advocate for Rouse and for American composers generally; completing the program are two great late-Romantic vehicles, Barber's Violin Concerto (with a frequent Philharmonic guest, Lisa Batiashvili) and Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Feb. 5 at 7:30 and Feb. 6-7 at 8.)

Orpheus Chamber Orchestra

Choosing the right soloists is a paramount concern at the renowned conductorless chamber orchestra. Augustin Dumay, an admired veteran of the Franco-Belgian school of violin playing—of which his recording of the Beethoven violin sonatas, with the pianist Maria João Pires, is an impressive example—is out front this week, performing the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in a concert that also includes music by Rameau, the young composer Timo Andres (a New York premiere), and the eternally youthful Schubert (the Symphony No. 5 in B-Flat Major, a product of the composer's nineteenth year). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Feb. 7 at 7.)

The MET Orchestra

James Levine, amazingly, endures. His latest, off-piste concert with his glorious pit musicians at Carnegie Hall finds him returning to music by old favorites: Beethoven, Berg (the Seven Early Songs, with the mezzo-soprano Elina Garanča), Carter ("Three Illusions," late jewels from the workshop), and Schumann (the lyrically overpowering Symphony No. 2 in C Major). (212-247-7800. Feb. 8 at 3.)

RECITALS

Matthew Polenzani

The American tenor brings his meticulous musicianship—not to mention a voice that has filled out beautifully in recent years—to bear on a varied recital program with the esteemed collaborative pianist Julius Drake, at Alice Tully Hall. The selections range from the showy extroversion of Liszt's lieder to the ten miniatures of Barber's "Hermit Songs," each one a graceful moment of solitude; songs by Satie and Ravel will be sung in between. (212-721-6500. Feb. 4 at 7:30.)

Joyce DiDonato and the Brentano String Quartet

Midway through her series of Perspectives concerts at Carnegie Hall, the often dazzling and always hardworking mezzo-soprano continues to expand her wide-ranging C.V. Demonstrating her affinity for new music, DiDonato sings two contemporary works at Zankel Hall: "Camille Claudel: Into the Fire," by her frequent collaborator Jake Heggie, and "MotherSongs," a cycle of four lullabies written by expectant and new teen mothers and arranged by Luna Pearl Woolf. The sterling Brentanos join her for both; they also perform Charpentier's Suite in D Minor and Debussy's String Quartet on their own. (212-247-7800. Feb. 5 at 7:30.)

Pamela Z and Joan La Barbara

Two legends of avant-garde vocalism—the first based in San Francisco, the second in New York—team up at Lincoln Center's David Rubenstein Atrium for a free concert in which they will sing solo, in duet, and with electronic backup. (Broadway between 62nd and 63rd Sts. Feb. 5 at 7:30. No tickets required.)

Miller Theatre "Composer Portrait":

Missy Mazzoli

Mazzoli, one of the brightest lights to emerge from the pop-tinged post-minimalism furnace that is the Yale School of Music, headlines a Miller concert that reflects her growing career. Ethel, the paragon of New York new-music string quartets, performs the world premiere of her "Quartet for Queen Mab," in addition to a selection of works performed by the Mivos Quartet, the soprano Marnie Breckenridge, and others. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Feb. 5 at 8.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: Orion String Quartet

Precise execution and rich unanimity of tone are the hallmarks of this long-admired group, which joins the violinist Ida Kavafian and the flutist Tara Helen O'Connor for a program that represents the apex of the Classical style: works by Haydn (the Quartet in G Minor, "The Rider"), Beethoven (the dulcet Serenade for Flute, Violin, and Viola, Op. 25), Boccherini, and Mozart (the Viola Quintet in D Major, K. 593). (Alice Tully Hall. 212-875-5788. Feb. 6 at 7:30.)

Thomas Hampson

The baritone's professorial demeanor sometimes blunts his presence on the opera stage, but he is an edifying, even poetic, interpreter of song literature. Hampson's recital program at Carnegie Hall reveals his catholic taste, with sets exploring Ives's peculiar yet touching American portraits and Richard Strauss's decadent harmonies, as well as samplings from the catalogues of Mahler, Hindemith, and Bernstein. Hampson and his recital partner, the pianist Wolfram Rieger, also premiere a new work, "Civil Words," by Jennifer Higdon. (212-247-7800. Feb. 9 at 8.)

Richard Egarr

The British musician, who has achieved eminence both as a harpsichordist and as the music director of the Academy of Ancient Music, comes to Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall to offer a recital of music by Bach (including the French Suite No. 5 in G Major) and Handel. (212-247-7800. Feb. 9 at 7:30.)

New York Philharmonic "Contact!" Series: "New Music From Israel"

The title pretty much says it all: this concert is a selection of pieces by some of Israel's most talented composers, a group that features the distinguished veterans Josef Bardanashvili and Shulamit Ran ("Mirage"), as well as such notable young voices as Yotam Haber and Avner Dorman (the New York premiere of "Jerusalem Mix"). The fine musicians include the oboist Sherry Sylar and the pianist Eric Huebner. (SubCulture, 45 Bleecker St. nyphil.org. Feb. 9 at 7:30.)

"NYFOS Next: Paul Moravec and Friends"

The prestigious New York Festival of Song, which for several years has given contemporary composers room to run in an occasional series of concerts, is building up its programming by offering a mini-festival in February. The second of three presentations centers on music by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, whose opera "The Shining" (based on the Stephen King novel) is set to have its world premiere at Minnesota Opera in 2016. Other composers featured on the program include Paola Prestini, Christopher Theofanidis, and James Primosch ("Waltzing the Spheres"). (National Opera Center, 330 Seventh Ave. nyfos.org. Feb. 10 at 7.)



New York City Ballet

Justin Peck unveils his newest work, set to Aaron Copland's "Rodeo." It's a bold move to take on this famous score, so memorably put to use by Agnes de Mille, in 1942. Peck has done away with the story and the cowboy theme, concentrating instead on what he calls the "fantastic energy" of the music. • Feb. 4 and Feb. 10 at 7:30 and Feb. 8 at 8: "Pictures at an Exhibition," the new Justin Peck ballet, and "Mercurial Manoeuvres." • Feb. 5 at 7:30 and Feb. 7 at 8: "Concerto Barocco" and "The Goldberg Variations." • Feb. 6 at 8: "Hallelujah Junction," "A Place for Us," and "The Goldberg Variations." • Feb. 7 at 2: "Hallelujah Junction," "A Place for Us," "Interplay," and "Glass Pieces." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Through March 1.)

Nederlands Dans Theatre 2

This ensemble favors a new generation of European dancemakers who make work that is expressionistic and absurdist, and often verges on the surreal. The duet "Shutters Shut," by Paul Lightfoot and Sol León, is a pantomimic reenactment of the Gertrude Stein poem "If I Told Him," complete with insistent repetitions. Another work by the duo, "Subject to Change," set to Schubert's "Death and the Maiden,"

suggests a couple's inner turmoil. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Feb. 3-8.)

Suzanne Beahrs Dance

Last year, in her first showing at St. Mark's Church, Beahrs revealed herself to be a capable, serious choreographer who had yet to develop a distinctive voice. Her new piece "Rise" may show progress on that front. It's about the process of individuation: the influence of teachers, the pushing off from that influence, a bold baring of eccentricity and self-acceptance. (Dancepace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-352-3101. Feb. 5-7.)

Cedar Lake Contemporary Ballet

Every so often, the public is invited into this troupe's fancy headquarters in the Chelsea gallery district for wander-where-you-wish, installation-style performances. This one is conceived and directed by the organization's new artistic director, Alexandra Damiani. More than half of the sixteen company members also serve as choreographers. Live accompaniment comes from the violin-and-violoncello duo Chargaux, who look and sound as fashionable as the dancers. (Cedar Lake, 547 W. 26th St. 212-868-4444. Feb. 6-7.)

Koresh Dance Company

Earthy, folk-dancey, emotionally direct, physically intense, and ostentatiously eccentric, the work of the Israeli-born, Philadelphia-based choreographer Roni Koresh resembles that of his Israeli contemporary Ohad Naharin. Koresh's new work "Come Together" juxtaposes pieces by Beethoven and Chopin with music from Israel and Turkey. (Schimmel Center, Pace University, 3 Spruce St. 866-811-4111. Feb. 6-7.)

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NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Jamie Cullum

Infusing jazz with pop sensibilities, this piano-pounding British singer-songwriter brings a rock star's charisma to his work. He may be a jazz artist first and foremost, but he's just as inspired by the likes of Rihanna and Pharrell as he is by Herbie Hancock—and he blurs the lines between genres accordingly. “Interlude,” his seventh album, is his most traditional yet, serving up fresh, celebratory interpretations of both American-songbook standards and contemporary gems. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 212-465-6500. Feb. 5.)

D'Angelo and the Vanguard

In 1991, a sixteen-year-old Virginia singer and songwriter named Michael Archer competed in Amateur Night at the Apollo with his band, Precise. The group won the competition three

nights in a row, and Archer used the cash prize to purchase recording equipment. He then adopted his middle name, D'Angelo, for his debut album, “Brown Sugar,” from 1995, and the rest is history. His follow-up album, “Voodoo,” came out in 2000, and after that he took an almost mythic break. Then, this past December, he released his long-awaited third record, “Black Messiah,” with only a few days' notice. The album is of a piece with D'Angelo's other work, incorporating layered vocals, organic-rhythm tracks, and an oblique but sharp political consciousness; it catapulted him back to the top of the critical heap. He returns to the Apollo with his band on Feb. 7. (253 W. 125th St. 800-745-3000.)

Chris Forsyth & the Solar Motel Band

Two years ago, Forsyth, an electric guitarist with roots in experimental noise music, released a compelling solo record, “Solar Motel,” that celebrated rock formalism with riff-driven songs and fluid Americana-tinged leads. After

its release, he assembled a touring band, which last October put out “Intensity Ghost.” Built on the interplay between Forsyth and his fellow-guitarist Paul Sukeena (now replaced by the equally gifted Nick Millevoi), the songs draw inspiration from various classic guitar tandems, including Jerry Garcia and Bob Weir, of the Grateful Dead, and Television's Tom Verlaine and Richard Lloyd. But, unlike the output of those groups, Forsyth's tunes are instrumental, which, like an elegant modernist building, highlights the mechanics of their construction. (Union Pool, 484 Union Ave., Brooklyn. 718-609-0484. Feb. 5.)

Henry Kaiser

This Santa Cruz-based experimental guitarist—also a renowned underwater filmmaker and Antarctic research diver—has been exploring the outer limits of his instrument since the seventies, when he helped to pioneer an unconventional delay technique that allowed him to manipulate multiple guitar lines simultaneously. An uncompromising improviser, Kaiser creates wide-ranging, idiosyncratic music, drawing inspiration from the folk music of Madagascar, progressive rock, and free jazz. He has also scored dozens of film and television projects, including works for the German director Werner Herzog, who used some of Kaiser's underwater footage in two of his films. In a rare New York residency, Kaiser will be joined by several like-minded artists, including the bassist **Bill Laswell**, the saxophonist **John Zorn**, the noise guitarist **Alan Licht**, and the noted science-fiction writer **Samuel R. Delany**, who will give a reading accompanied by Kaiser's guitar. (The Stone, Ave. C and 2nd St. 212-473-0043. Feb. 3-8.)

Porches and Frankie Cosmos

Aaron Maine and his girlfriend, Greta Kline, the daughter of Kevin Kline and Phoebe Cates, are two young singer-songwriters living in Manhattan, where Kline studies poetry at N.Y.U., and they sing and play in each other's bands. Maine's burly voice is the centerpiece of his mope-rock act Porches. He splits the bill with Kline's earnest anti-folk project, Frankie Cosmos (an allusion to the poet Frank O'Hara). Both groups' songs are peppered with inside jokes and personal references, and they plumb the emotionally charged lows of bedroom folk and pop. (Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. Feb. 6.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Alternative Guitar Summit

Joel Harrison, a guitarist who always has his sights set on expanding the scope of his instrument, is the brains behind this annual event, which brings together an eclectic range of broad-minded instrumentalists who share his vision. Participants include **Lee Ranaldo**, **David Fiuczynski**, **Sheryl Bailey**, **Michael Gregory Jackson**, and **Doug Wamble**, idiosyncratic originals all. (Feb. 4, at Shapeshifter Lab, 18 Whitwell Pl., Brooklyn, and Feb. 6-8, at Rockwood Music Hall, 196 Allen St. joelharrison.com.)

Jane Ira Bloom Trio

The high-pitched soprano has been the auxiliary instrument for jazz saxophonists ever since John Coltrane popularized the horn, in the early sixties. Few present-day performers (aside from Kenny G) concentrate on it solely, but Bloom is an exception. A virtuoso player with a taste for the visionary (she's contributed to the NASA arts program and has an asteroid named for her), Bloom explores the border between charted and unexplored terrain. She has the perfect partners for this venture in the bassist **Mark Helias** and the drummer **Bobby Previte**. (Cornelia Street Café, 29 Cornelia St. 212-989-9319. Feb. 8.)

Lea DeLaria

A larger-than-life talent, DeLaria shares the taste for jazz and standards that she has displayed on recordings in the course of the past two decades. She's currently in the midst of a pledge-funded campaign to complete a David Bowie tribute album, so expect a few Thin White Duke favorites, too. (Appel Room, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Feb. 5.)

Roy Hargrove

The trumpeter Hargrove headlines a twentieth-anniversary celebration of the Jazz Gallery. It's a logical booking—the performance space originated in Hargrove's work studio, a loft in SoHo. Eventually, it became home to a nonprofit organization devoted to promising players and venturesome performers. The gallery moved uptown in 2012, but its artistic mandate remains intact. Hargrove pairs himself with two up-and-coming trumpeters: **Adam O'Farrill**, on Feb. 6, and **Marquis Hill**, on Feb. 7. (1160 Broadway, at 27th St., Fifth fl. 646-494-3625.)



D'Angelo plays the Apollo, his first concert appearance since releasing his stunning, long-awaited third album, “Black Messiah.”

X MOVIES



Duane Jones and Seret Scott appear in the rarely screened, newly restored independent film "Losing Ground."

LOST AND FOUND

Kathleen Collins's 1982 feature gets its first release at Film Society of Lincoln Center.

"TELL IT LIKE IT IS: Black Independents in New York, 1968-1986" (Film Society of Lincoln Center, Feb. 6-19) is more than just a cinematic feast; it's a revelation. The film that opens the series, Kathleen Collins's "Losing Ground," from 1982, will play for a week, making up for the fact that it has never had a theatrical release. The movie is a nearly lost masterwork. It's the only feature that Collins—who died in 1988, at the age of forty-six—made. Had it screened widely in its time, it would have marked film history.

Collins, who had a master's degree in French literature, was a film professor at City College of New York, and the movie is centered on the fault lines of her academic and artistic passions. It's about a middle-class black couple, Sarah (Seret Scott), a young professor of philosophy who's writing a treatise on aesthetics, and her husband, Victor (Bill Gunn), an older artist who has just sold a painting to a major museum. At his behest, they spend the summer in a village in upstate New York, where he's fascinated by the landscape, the light, and the Puerto Rican women who live there—especially Celia (Maritza Rivera), who becomes the subject of his art and the object of his attention. Meanwhile, Sarah, whose own work is stifled in the rustic setting, returns to the city to act in a film student's senior project, a dance-centered movie in which she's paired with a suave and sympathetic middle-aged actor (Duane Jones).

Though Collins was a civil-rights activist in the early sixties, she never even glances at practical politics in "Losing Ground." Rather, she traces the private scars of history in artists' lives and work, and that subject opens the film, via Sarah's classroom lecture on the wartime origins

of French existentialism.

The passionate romance of mismatched equals, Sarah's intellectual confidence, and even her identity shudder under unresolved conflicts of race and gender. In Collins's vision, the life of a black person—in particular, of a black woman—is a perilous existential adventure.

Collins's calm, analytical compositions, with their bright colors and lambent light, form lyrical tableaux that highlight the actors' vulnerable intimacy. Scott's taut, balletic poise lends Sarah's crisis a quiet agony, and Gunn (who died in 1989) is aptly persuasive in the role of a determined artist: he, too, was a great director, whose films "Ganja and Hess" (Feb. 7-8) and "Personal Problems" (Feb. 7 and Feb. 10) will be screened in the series.

Voice-over recitations of an essay of Sarah's about the roots of art in ecstatic experience illuminate both the character's philosophical energy and Collins's artistic quest. She films with a transformative simplicity, reminiscent of the style of Roberto Rossellini, unfolding daily activities with forthright beauty and didactic clarity. The film-within-a-film sequences in which Sarah dances are among the best musical numbers in the modern cinema. Collins has made, in effect, a musical with no fantasy but plenty of imagination. "Losing Ground" plays like the record of a life revealed in real time.

—Richard Brody

OPENING BALLET 422

Jody Lee Lipes directed this documentary, about the creative process of the choreographer Justin Peck. Opening Feb. 6. (In limited release.)

JUPITER ASCENDING

The siblings Andy and Lana Wachowski directed this science-fiction fantasy, about a janitor (Mila Kunis) who is recruited for intergalactic adventure by an outer-space mercenary (Channing Tatum). Opening Feb. 6. (In wide release.)

1971

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening Feb. 6. (In limited release.)

SEVENTH SON

A fantasy drama, directed by Sergey Bodrov, about a young man (Ben Barnes) who is mentored by a wizard (Jeff Bridges). Co-starring Julianne Moore, Alicia Vikander, and Djimon Hounsou. Opening Feb. 6. (In wide release.)

THE VOICES

In this horror comedy, a mentally ill man (Ryan Reynolds) becomes a serial killer. Directed by Marjane Satrapi; co-starring Gemma Arterton and Anna Kendrick. Opening Feb. 6. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

The films of Dziga Vertov. Feb. 6 at 7:30: "The Man with a Movie Camera" (1929). • Feb. 7 at 4:30: "Kino-Eye" (1925). • Feb. 7 at 6:15: "Forward, Soviet!" (1925-26). • Feb. 7 at 8: "Enthusiasm, or Symphony of the Don Basin." • Feb. 8 at 4:45: "A Sixth of the World" (1926). • Feb. 8 at 6:30: "The Eleventh Year" (1928). • Feb. 8 at 8: "Three Songs about Lenin" (1934). • The films of Aleksei Guerman. Feb. 9 at 6:30 and Feb. 10 at 9: "Khrustalyov, My Car!" (1998). • Feb. 9 at 9:15: "My Friend Ivan Lapshin" (1984). • Feb. 10 at 6:45: "Trial on the Road" (1971).

BAM CINÉMA TEK

The films of John Carpenter. Feb. 5 at 8: A discussion with Carpenter and the writer Brooke Gladstone. • Feb. 6 at 3, 5, 7:30, and 10: "Halloween" (1978). • Feb. 7 at 7 and 9:30: "The Thing" (1982). • Feb. 8 at 6:30 and 8:30: "The Fog" (1980). • Feb. 9 at 5, 7:15, and 9:30: "In the Mouth of Madness" (1994). • Feb. 10 at 5, 7:15, and 9:30: "Memoirs of an Invisible Man" (1992). •

FILM FORUM

Special screening. Feb. 5 at 7:30: "Too Much Johnson" (1938, Orson Welles), accompanied by a reading of the original play by William Gillette.

NOW PLAYING

American Sniper

Clint Eastwood's new film is a devastating pro-war movie and a devastating antiwar movie, a sombre celebration of a warrior's happiness and a sorrowful lament over a warrior's alienation and misery. Eastwood, working with the screenwriter Jason Hall, has adapted the 2012 best-seller by the Navy SEAL sharpshooter Chris Kyle, who is played here by Bradley Cooper. The film is devoted to Kyle's life as a son, husband, father, and, most of all, righteous assassin—a man always sure he is defending his country in Iraq against what he calls "savages." Perched on a rooftop in Ramadi or Sadr City, he's methodical and imperturbable, and he hardly ever misses. For the role of Kyle, Cooper got all beefed up—from the looks of it, by beer as much as by iron (it's intentionally not a movie-star body). With his brothers in the field, Kyle is convivial, profane, and funny; at home with his loving wife (played by Sienna Miller, who's excellent), he's increasingly withdrawn, dead-eyed, enraptured only by the cinema of war that's playing in his mind. As Kyle and his men rampage through the rubble of Iraqi cities, the camera records exactly what's needed to dramatize a given event and nothing more. There's no waste, never a moment's loss of concentration, definition, or speed; the atmosphere of the cities, and life on the streets, gets packed into the purposeful action shots.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/14.) (In wide release.)

Blackhat

When a hacker causes a meltdown at a Chinese nuclear reactor and manipulates soy futures at Chicago's commodities exchange, the F.B.I.—and its agent Carol Barrett (Viola Davis)—collaborates with Chen Dawai (Wang Leehom), a cyber-soldier from China, and Nick Hathaway (Chris Hemsworth), an imprisoned American super-hacker who was Dawai's roommate at M.I.T. (If Nick catches the villain, his sentence will be commuted.) The director, Michael Mann, offers some dazzling computer graphics to conjure the electron flux on which the modern world works, but then abandons them for the methodical plotting of a sprawling, disconnected, neutered thriller. Nick quickly morphs from a digital wizard into a standard-issue paramilitary superhero; he and Dawai's sister, Chen Lien (Tang Wei), fall in love and join forces in what becomes a jet-setting international caper. Though Mann stages a few striking shoot-outs, shows some gore, and delivers some topical references to cyber-politics, he can't mask the over-all sense of a mere simulacrum of characters, action, and, for that matter, thrills. Hints of a quasi-apocalyptic chill seem arbitrary—neither symbolic nor

dramatic. The effect is like watching software run itself.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

Cake

A car accident has left Claire Bennett (Jennifer Aniston), a Los Angeles lawyer, with scars on her face and a surgically reconstructed body. Spewing acerbic contempt for the pain of others, she gets kicked out of a support group. Unable to move without agony, she suffers, above all, from grief at the loss of her young son in the crash. She's addicted to painkillers, and goes to extremes (including blackmail) to get them, putting her devoted housekeeper, Silvana (Adriana Barraza), through increasing difficulties and dangers. Meanwhile, Claire's hallucinations of a suicide victim (Anna Kendrick) launch her on flailing but heartfelt efforts at forging connections with others. This howling melodrama, directed by Daniel Barnz, is tamped down and thinned out to showcase Aniston's actorly subtlety, but what results is, in effect, a feature-length promotional reel. Barnz limits Claire's life, inner and outer, to moments that allow for methodical expressions, and Aniston delivers them with an acting-class precision against which her powerful personality and formidable humor constantly strain. Barraza conveys the weight of experience in sighs and inflections, and Kendrick is incisively sly, but the slack and purposeless direction leaves the entire cast emoting in a void.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Du Côté d'Orouët

Jacques Rozier's unstrung comedy, from 1973, is about three young Parisian women who take a September vacation at an old, cozy waterfront house on the west coast of France. Caroline, whose mother owns the house, invites her cousin Kareen, who in turn invites her friend Joëlle, a secretary whose youngish boss, Gilbert, soon shows up uninvited. Suddenly, the women's seaside capers—filmed by Rozier with handheld intimacy and Impressionist flair—become fraught with erotic tension. The uptight, awkward Gilbert endures the women's mocking flirtations; the arrival of Patrick, a suave sailor, leaves Gilbert in the shadows to nourish a crush on Joëlle, who likes Patrick, who likes Kareen. Rozier builds elaborate set pieces from trivial premises—a bucket of eels, a set of wooden clogs—and creates an exquisite sequence around Kareen's childhood recollections of the house. The romantic heart of the film is the creation of memories; as the characters wander into bittersweet adventures, they leave breadcrumb trails of instant nostalgia. With his blend of delicate understatement and raucous spontaneity, Rozier may be the most secretly influential director of the era.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; Feb. 10.)

The Duke of Burgundy

What first appears, in the deft contrivance of the writer and director Peter Strickland, to be the wicked abuse of a housemaid by her employer turns out to be the elaborate erotic ritual of a settled lesbian couple. Cynthia (Sidse Babbett Knudsen) is a staid lepidopterist; Evelyn (Chiara D'Anna), of no apparent trade, is a masochist who needs physical and emotional punishment to get off, and her desires dictate the rigid theatrics of the pair's intimate routine. Strickland ensconces the lovers in a sumptuous villa in a rural enclave apparently inhabited only by women. He delights in a luxurious retro-rusticity of lustrous furniture and fancy clothing, and he fashions a glossy yet familiar camera style to match. Fissures in the couple's relationship appear as Evelyn's demands for scheduled abuse grow increasingly stringent, raising the suspense effectively, if belatedly. Portentous images of insects both living and preserved are as heavy-handed as the erotic psychology is flimsy; the movie is as sexy as a chess game and as insightful as a catalogue. One line of dialogue enters the anthology of howlers: "Had I ordered a human toilet, none of this would have happened."—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Enthusiasm, or Symphony of the Don Basin

The vigor and horror of the Russian Revolution provide both the substance and the stylistic inspiration of Dziga Vertov's 1931 film. It begins with a historic transformation by means of mass media: a young woman's enlightenment thanks to a radio broadcast of a symphony orchestra. This cultural modernization is linked, by allusive editing, to another form of modernization—the desanctification of churches that occurs as Communists pillage icons, cut the crosses off domes, and topple steeples with a roaring mob violence. Vertov dramatizes these acts with jazzy imagery that includes multiple exposures and animation. He films with a wild, expressive energy, panning rapidly with the swinging clapper of a bell and depicting electric wires as ecstatic striations of the sky. Rapid industrialization under a five-year plan is filmed with high-contrast, abstract flamboyance and audacious optical manipulations. Vertov's love of pure geometric forms, as conjured by striking angles on train tracks and orderly ranks of Party members, contrasts painfully with a partisan sculptor's old-fashioned bust of Lenin; that contrast is the film's stifled tragedy.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives; Feb. 7.)

Girlhood

The protagonist of this drama is Marieme (Karidja Touré), a sixteen-year-old black French girl growing up in a housing project on the outskirts of Paris. Relegated to vocational school, facing scant employment opportunities,

and chafing under the authority of her elder brother, Marieme falls in with a trio of tough girls in whose company she learns to steal, fight, drink, and, above all, stand up for herself and acknowledge her desires. The approach of the writer and director Céline Sciamma is rote and deterministic; her scenes illustrate a checklist of social issues to which only her thoughtful and lively actors lend flesh and blood. Marieme's boyfriend doesn't dare make a move for fear of disrespecting her brother, who is also his friend. As Marieme advances from petty banditry to bigger crimes, the film's bitter irony emerges: she has no other springboard with which to propel herself from the grip of patriarchal power and toward the mainstream of French life. Sciamma binds the awakening of Marieme's consciousness to dramatic action, reducing the extraordinary character's mental life to a series of plot points—albeit ones that lead to a fascinating crossroads. A sequel, please. In French.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Hard to Be a God

The late director Aleksei Guerman's last film is a grandly arbitrary carnival of neo-medieval depravity. It's also a mudpunk allegory of Russian barbarism and backwardness. The action is set on a planet that knew no Renaissance (let alone an Enlightenment) and keeps its inhabitants, with their modern-day consciousness and vernacular, trapped in the low-tech crudeness and amoral violence of the Middle Ages. The protagonist is an Earth-born scientist sent to investigate the retrograde realm, where he's known as the nobleman Don Rumata and is considered divine. The drama begins with the killing of an intellectual critic, which sends the stagnant society into an inexorable spiral of wanton slaughter. Guerman films these monstrous visions with an obsessive attention to detail. With a glistening black-and-white palette, he smears the screen with mud, blood, and excrement; he displays a mad glee in designing, building, and deploying grotesque tools of torture and murder; his roving, wide-angle closeups render the teeming cast as living gargoyles. Yet his disgust and horror are set off with aesthetically distanced satire; the movie's artful pride in brazen destruction is itself a political commentary. In Russian.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives.)

The Humbling

The new Barry Levinson film is based on Philip Roth's short novel of the same name. Who better to dramatize Roth's Newark than the guy who re-created a half-lost, sharply remembered Baltimore? But that is not what we get. Instead, we get Broadway and Connecticut, and the strange saga of Simon Axler, a noted actor who has forgotten how to act—played to the hilt, and all the way to the pommel,

by Al Pacino, who has most certainly not forgotten, and is out to prove it. He commandeers the movie, dawdling over his speeches and leaving other performers fighting for space and breath. Simon is threatened not just by a professional impasse but by the arrival of strangers at his country home. There is the lesbian (Greta Gerwig), many years his junior, with whom he starts a desultory affair; her former lover (Billy Porter), who has now changed sex; and Sybil (Nina Arianda), whom Simon met at a sanatorium, and who draws him into her maddening delusions. At one point, our hero is locked out of a theatre and has to race round to the public entrance, in a kind of wounded scurry; Michael Keaton does the same thing, in "Birdman," at marching pace. Take your pick. With Charles Grodin, Dylan Baker, and Dianne Wiest.—*Anthony Lane* (2/2/15) (In limited release.)

Mommy

There's a mild futuristic thrust to the young Canadian director Xavier Dolan's new film—in which a law allows parents to deliver their problem children to the care of the state—but the movie's story, set in and around Montreal, is utterly contemporary. Steve (Antoine-Olivier Pilon), a teen-ager, gets expelled from school after setting fire to it; his tough, determined mother, Diane, or "Die" (Anne Dorval), a widow, decides to homeschool Steve but can't control him. Steve's impulsively outrageous behavior, involving insults, theft, and violence, offers no access to his inner life and has no basis in psychology; rather, it appears as Dolan's own pseudo-transgressive artistic tantrum. When a kindly neighbor, Kyla (Suzanne Clément), a teacher on furlough for stuttering, volunteers to tutor Steve, things start looking up for him; when a local lawyer helps Die in the hope of courting her, Steve has an Oedipal freakout. Mother and son gesticulate wildly but remain undefined; Dolan's blandly showy aesthetic matches the vainly hectic action. In French.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

1971

This documentary, by Johanna Hamilton, unpacks a crucial but little-known episode in modern political and journalistic history. On March 8, 1971, eight antiwar activists broke into a small F.B.I. office in the aptly named town of Media, Pennsylvania, and stole files showing that the government was trying to suppress legitimate dissent; they mailed copies to the *Washington Post*, which, despite government pressure, reported on them. The eight perpetrators were never found; here, Hamilton films five of them admitting to the break-in for the first time and describing their actions in detail. The story, including

its cat-and-mouse aftermath, adds the intricate excitement of a thriller to righteous historical outrage. The activists' revelations, plus a crucial follow-up by the television reporter Carl Stern—who is interviewed here, as is Betty Medsger, who broke the story in the *Post*—ultimately led to Senate hearings in 1975 (where dirty tricks against Martin Luther King, Jr., were disclosed). Only unimaginative dramatic recreations of the events mar the fine fabric of Hamilton's cinematic journalism.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Paddington

The title belongs to a bear, who arrives in London as a stowaway, speaking flawless English, with etiquette to match. The locals are no more surprised by this phenomenon than New Yorkers were by Stuart Little. Paul King's film, adapted from the books by Michael Bond, constructs a plot of sorts: Paddington's hide is sought by a taxidermist of malicious intent (Nicole Kidman), but the Brown family, who took him in—not without qualms—as a stranger, come to his rescue and thus to a full acknowledgment of his worth. There is a touch of the didactic here, with viewers reminded of their duty to refugees, and yet, from the opening sequence (featuring mock-historical footage from Paddington's native Peru), the result is gratifyingly unstiff. We get fountains of slapstick, fed by a stream of inventive whimsy; even the leaves on the trees, painted on the walls of the Brown household, bud or blow away with the movie's mood. With Hugh Bonneville, Sally Hawkins, and Jim Broadbent. Originally, Colin Firth was to provide the hero's voice, but he was replaced by Ben Whishaw: lighter, more quizzical, and less wise.—*A.L.* (1/19/15) (In wide release.)

Selma

Like "Lincoln," Ava DuVernay's stirring movie avoids the lifetime-highlights strategy of standard bio-pics and concentrates instead on a convulsive political process—the events leading up to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. President Lyndon Johnson (Tom Wilkinson), eager to move on to the War on Poverty, is pressured to change direction by Martin Luther King, Jr. (David Oyelowo), who is fighting for voting rights in the Oval Office and on the streets of Alabama. DuVernay captures King's canny and dominating resourcefulness in strategy meetings as well as the grand rhetoric of his public speeches, and Oyelowo adds a sexiness and an altered rhythm to King's speech patterns; his King is aggressive, barbed. A sequence set on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, as hundreds of protesters advance across the span and the Alabama state troopers terrorize them with tear gas, recalls the magnificent

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

"Tell It Like It Is: Black Independents in New York, 1968-1986." Feb. 6 at 1, 2:45, 4:30, and 8:30; Feb. 7 at 3:15; Feb. 8-9 and Feb. 11 at 1, Feb. 10 at 3:30, and Feb. 12 at 2: "Losing Ground" (1982, Kathleen Collins). • Feb. 6 at 6:30 and Feb. 11 at 3: "The Cruz Brothers and Miss Malloy" (1980, Collins). • Feb. 7 at 1: "Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One" (1968, William Greaves). • Feb. 7 at 5 and Feb. 8 at 8: "Ganja and Hess" (1973, Bill Gunn). • Feb. 7 at 8 and Feb. 10 at 1: "Personal Problems" (1980, Gunn). • Feb. 8 at 3: "Inside Bedford-Stuyvesant Program" (1968-71; produced by Charles Hobson). • Feb. 8 at 5:15: Films by St. Clair Bourne, including "Something to Build On" (1971).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

"Eccentrics of French Comedy." Feb. 10 at 4 and 7:30: "Du Côté d'Orouët."

IFC CENTER

"Celluloid Dreams." Feb. 4 at 8: "Joe Versus the Volcano" (1990, John Patrick Shanley).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Carte Blanche: Women's Film Preservation Fund—Women Writing the Language of Cinema." Feb. 4 at 4: "Las Madres: The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo" (1985, by Susana Muñoz and Lourdes Portillo). • Feb. 4 at 7: "Illusions" (1982, Julie Dash) and "Dirty Gertie from Harlem U.S.A." (1946, Spencer Williams). • Feb. 5 at 7: "When Pigs Fly" (1993, Sara Driver). • Feb. 6 at 4: "Behind the Scenes" (1914, James Kirkwood). • Feb. 6 at 7: "The Wind." • Feb. 7 at 1:30: "The Trouble with Angels" (1966, Ida Lupino). • Feb. 7 at 4:30: "The Young Lovers." • Feb. 8 at 1: "The Wild Party" (1929, Dorothy Arzner). • Feb. 8 at 5:30: "The Watermelon Woman" (1996, Cheryl Dunye). • Feb. 8 at 6:30: "The Virgin Suicides" and "Make Out" (1970, Geri Ashur).



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Nanni Moretti's "Caro Diario," from 1993, in our digital edition and online.

crowd scenes from Soviet silent classics by Eisenstein and Pudovkin. With Carmen Ejogo, as Coretta Scott King; Colman Domingo, as the Reverend Ralph Abernathy; Tim Roth, as Governor George Wallace; and Oprah Winfrey, as the civil-rights activist Annie Lee Cooper. The script was written by Paul Webb and DuVernay (who is uncredited).—*D.D.* (12/22 & 29/14) (In wide release.)

Still Alice

Julianne Moore stars as Alice Howland, a professor of linguistics at Columbia, who is stricken with early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Hitherto, life with her husband (Alec Baldwin) and three children (Kate Bosworth, Hunter Parrish, and Kristen Stewart) has run with enviable smoothness; now it hits a wall. What takes her and her loved ones aback is the force of that impact, and the rate at which she goes from forgetting a word, in passing, to not recognizing her own daughter. The intentions of the movie, which was written and directed by Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland, are noble to a fault, and guaranteed to spur fellow-feeling in anyone familiar with Alice's condition; yet the outcome errs toward dullness, and the ironies are the size of billboards. (So what if she was an expert on language use? Would the loss be any less grievous if she were a waitress?) The film, as

tasteful as the trimmings of her life, shies from the horror of seeing them torn away. People behave sadly, but not badly; would that it were always the case. And would that the actors, too, especially Moore and Stewart, had been let off the leash, as they strive toward harder and wilder truths.—*A.L.* (1/19/15) (In limited release.)

Timbuktu

Abderrahmane Sissako has not made a full-length film since "Bamako" (2006), but his new movie is worth the wait. It takes place in Mali, in the city of the title: a place of renown and legend, reduced here to a fearful labyrinth of narrow, dusty passageways. Islamic forces have come to town (as they did in 2012-13), imposing Sharia law and wreaking stern punishments—flaying and stoning—on the most serious offenders. Sissako, however, is no less concerned with the petty, at times laughable, strictures that come into force—what is so enticing about the hands of hard-working women that gloves should be made compulsory? A number of stories are in play, the most touching of which is that of Kidane (Ibrahim Ahmed), an easygoing fellow who gets into a feud over cattle and ends up, under the new regime, at the mercy of the merciless. The film could scarcely be more timely, and its response to the violence and grinding moral scorn

of the militants could not be more instructive; in place of outrage and panic, Sissako offers irony, quick wit, a taste for the oblique, and even a measure of tranquillity. In Arabic, Tamasheq, and French.—*A.L.* (2/2/15) (In limited release.)

The Virgin Suicides

For her first feature, from 1999, Sofia Coppola adapted Jeffrey Eugenides's novel, about the desperate escape of five teen-age girls from their repressive family, as a surprisingly intricate struggle with absence, grief, and memory. The story (set in suburban Michigan in 1974 and told mainly in flashbacks) is anchored by the charismatic Lux (Kirsten Dunst), the most daring of the Lisbon sisters, whose golden dreams appear fleetingly onscreen. But she, like the other girls, remains alluringly elusive as Coppola evokes, with poised and precise images, the dream-like frustration of the boys—now men—who are still trying to read the pages that were torn from their lives. Coppola joins a deliciously evocative batch of period Top Forty tunes to flashes of backlit cinematography to summon the characters' lost world, with its stifled experience and receding fantasies. What remains tantalizingly out of reach for the girls—as for the boys who have lost them—is ordinary life. Already, with her first film, Coppola was a master at

rendering inner depths startlingly, straightforwardly visual. With James Woods and Kathleen Turner, as the parents.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Feb. 8.)

The Young Lovers

For her first film as director, from 1949, Ida Lupino chose the harsh—and true—story of a young dancer (Sally Forrest) who, just as she and her partner and boyfriend (Keefe Brasselle) begin to catch a break, gets polio, is paralyzed, and faces a long and difficult rehabilitation. Filming on location in California, Lupino turns the potentially maudlin material into a searing, deep, trenchantly mature study in the dissolution of a personality. She gets raging, stunningly modern performances from pedestrian actors, burrowing deep into her characters' psyches; the script, which she co-wrote with Collier Young, conveys a surprisingly authentic and novelistic range of troubles, including divorce, postwar trauma, money matters, office politics, and extracurricular romantic entanglements. With a relentless directness and a simple yet daring technique, Lupino pushes situations past the point of comfort and, avoiding easy sentiment, uses the conventions of melodrama to express extreme emotion without losing sight of the workaday burdens of ordinary life; she films like a woman who balances her own checkbook.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Feb. 7.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

"East Ville des Folies"

It sometimes feels as though you can't take two steps in this town without hearing about the latest speakeasy or being offered absinthe from a man dressed like Puck, which can beg the question: Had alcohol not been illegal for thirteen years, almost a century ago, how would we theme our parties? But the forbidden fruit is always tastier, especially when fermented. So brush up on the Charleston, and enjoy feigned lawlessness at Webster Hall, the former site of a speakeasy reportedly owned by Al Capone during Prohibition. For the third annual "East Ville des Folies," all four floors of the music venue become a Prohibition-themed classroom for beer-and-whiskey education. But tastings are only part of the historical picture. Michael Arenella and his Dreamland Orchestra play Jazz Age music, as does the Queen Esther Trio, and Miss Ida Blue sings the blues. There's also a burlesque showcase, with the tap-dancing Gin Minsky,

the six-foot-five circus performer Mr. Gorgeous, and the scintillating dancer Cassandra Rosebeetle, among others. Proceeds go to the Third Street Music School Settlement, a nonprofit organization that offers music and dance instruction. (125 E. 11th St. 212-353-1600. websterhall.com. Feb. 7.)

"Second Sundays"

Pioneer Works, an artistic oasis in Red Hook, Brooklyn, is a museum, an educational facility, an artist residency, a magazine publisher, and an event space housed in what was once a nineteenth-century machine-manufacturing building. On the second Sunday of each month, the museum's exhibitions and artist-in-residence studios open for perusal in a party setting, with food, drinks, performances, and live music curated in collaboration with Olivier Conan, the proprietor of Park Slope's internationally themed music club Barbès. The Feb. 8 installment brings M.A.K.U. Soundsystem, Colombian

New York transplants who play an energetic mix of Afro-Colombian rhythms and psychedelic rock, and Tongues

in Trees, who specialize in indie music with Indian influences. (159 Pioneer Street, Brooklyn. 718-596-3001.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Greenlight Bookstore

The journalist Nelson George discusses his new novel, "The Lost Treasures of R&B." (686 Fulton St., at S. Portland Ave., Brooklyn. 718-246-0200. Feb. 4 at 7:30.)

"Muldoon's Picnic"

Paul Muldoon, the poetry editor for this magazine, organizes a monthly gathering of writers and musicians at Irish Arts Center. On Feb. 7 at 7:30, he's joined by Robert Sullivan, Colm Tóibín, Aoife O'Donovan, and Sam and Louise Sullivan. (553 W. 51st St. irishartscenter.org.)

"@Macaulay Author Series"

The novelist Allen Kurzweil discusses his memoir, "Whipping Boy: The Forty-Year Search for My Twelve-Year-Old Bully," with Susan Morrison, an editor at this magazine. (Macaulay Honors College at CUNY, 35 W. 67th St. 347-460-4292. Feb. 9 at 7.)

92nd Street Y

Erica Jong, Alice McDermott, Paul Muldoon, and Roger Rosenblatt gather for a pre-Valentine's Day discussion, titled "What We Write About When We Write About Love." (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5693. Feb. 10 at 8:15.)



TABLES FOR TWO

COSME

35 E. 21st St. (212-913-9659)

GETTING SEATED AT COSME takes some resolve. It's the undisputed opening of the season, and reservations are famously hard to come by. The phalanx of hosts stare at seating charts on their iPads with the grim, protracted confusion of airline check-in agents. The main dining room is past a long wall of curious Old World wines—the restaurant may be Mexican, but that's no excuse for a margarita. Seemingly everyone has ordered the chef Enrique Olvera's signature "burrata and weeds" dish, and, like that twenty-four-dollar appetizer, they ooze money. Should Cosme need a mascot, the man at the next table will do, in his fedora and mock turtleneck, looking like an angel investor on "Silicon Valley" and asking for another round of premium-tequila shots. If you build an expensive place in the Flatiron district, he will come.

That Olvera has made such a scene must not detract from his food, which is uniformly better than the crowd it draws. His restaurant in Mexico City, Pujol, is thought to be one of the world's best, and the smoked raw sepia will show you why: a tangle of translucent, slivered strands, tossed with the simplest of tomato salsas. The taste of the ocean announces itself as a zephyr, not a squall. The octopus cocktail is an agreeably blunt counterpoint, a lilac-colored soup with the consistency of drinkable yogurt, in which purple and blue corn and charred avocado bob alongside tentacled slices on the right side of chewy.

Cosme falls for the trend of the half-empty oversized plate, now an accepted shorthand for seriousness in the restaurant world. So be it. The small dishes that begin the meal are better anyhow, like the uni tostada, which demands to be passed around the group in traditional dorm-room fashion. It is mysteriously funky and strangely gelatinous. That's the bone marrow, an ingenious marriage of earth and sea, all mellowed out with a smear of avocado. One bite is perfect, and enough. Another winner, and a guarantee that you'll never look at Sabra the same way again, is the bean salad, actually a purée drizzled with habanero vinaigrette. There's cucumber in the dressing, too, prepared the way all vegetables should be, which is charred to the point of somehow tasting like bacon. But, if you've paid any attention to the hype, the entire endeavor might be a very delicious excuse for dessert: a corn-husk meringue with its own hashtag, possessed of an intensely milky taste from the mousse of mascarpone, cream, and corn purée that spills out like lava from its core. All is forgiven. Even the iPads.

—Amelia Lester

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FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB WINNIE'S

104 Bayard St. (212-732-2384)

The narrative arcs of nights spent drinking are sometimes self-imposed (pub crawl begins here, ends there), sometimes forced upon us (I woke up in Ronkonkoma!). At karaoke bars, the story's in the soundtrack, but who's doing the singing, of what, and how well—that's up to fate. One evening in Chinatown, a young woman in a Nirvana T-shirt took a break from mixing Hawaiian punches—a juggling act involving eight kinds of liquor, pineapple juice, and grenadine—to pull out a giant laser disk, grab a mic, and perform "Santeria," by Sublime. Then, sans segue, Willie Nelson's "Always on My Mind" was warbled by a lady in a denim shirt as she gazed adoringly at her date. More people ducked into the dingy room and, with Tsingtao beers in hand, slid into red pleather banquettes. The singer of "Coconut," by Harry Nilsson, parsed the song: "It's a Kafkaesque world where the medicine prescribed"—de lime in de coconut—"is what's causing the illness." Winnie Mui, the chic proprietress, appeared bemused by a curly-haired fellow's falsetto on "The Sign," by Ace of Base. John Denver's "Take Me Home, Country Roads" seemed like a tune to leave to. Unfortunately, the door was blocked by burly men seeking shots of Fireball cinnamon whiskey, who soon launched into a very loud performance of "Livin' on a Prayer." They hollered an improvised chorus: "The mic is not on! Is this mic even on?" It was.

—Emma Allen



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

GOD AND THE G.O.P.

The brief apparition of a third Mitt Romney Presidential bid vanished last Friday, with a conference call to several of his supporters. “You can’t imagine how hard it is for Ann and me to step aside,” Romney told them. He added that he thought he would have won the Republican nomination again, and that he’d had the “best chance,” this time, to win the Presidency. There was a surprising reason for this optimism, which he had alluded to a couple of weeks earlier, during a speech at the Republican National Committee’s winter meeting, on board the U.S.S. Midway. Despite his previous campaigns, people had not come to know the real Mitt Romney. He had been seen “as a business guy and a political guy.” Neither of those identities had worked—perhaps, although he didn’t say so, because they weren’t consistent with each other or with his record. Ann Romney, however, saw how he had “served as a pastor for a congregation and for groups of congregations,” a reference to his work as a lay bishop of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. If voters didn’t know this side of him, it was largely because he and his advisers had treated his Mormon faith as a liability, hardly to be spoken of, in part out of fear that it would alienate evangelicals in the Party’s base. But now Romney seemed ready to be the religious guy. “That’s the authentic Mitt,” a family friend in Utah told the *Washington Post*. The report added that members of Romney’s political circle “said they are considering making Salt Lake City, the cradle of Mormonism, his 2016 campaign headquarters.”

As it turned out, Romney’s faith and his sense of mission may have been most useful in explaining why he’d entertained the idea of what even many Republicans saw as an exercise in futility. Yet one aspect of it is worth examining further, owing to its implications for his Party. In his R.N.C. speech, Romney mentioned his pastoral work “with people who are very poor, to get them help and subsistence,” and he said that Republicans had to position them-

selves as opponents of inequality if they were to win the White House. He may be right, but it will be hard for the G.O.P. to shake the sense that Romney was being more true to his party’s principles three years ago when he said, of the so-called forty-seven per cent, “I’ll never convince them they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives.” This is a Republican dilemma, not a Mormon one.

Indeed, other potential G.O.P. candidates are now having to recalculate how another religion figures into the equation. There has never been a Catholic Republican nominee for the White House (the Mormons, interestingly, got there first), although there may be one this year, with a field that includes Rick Santorum, Chris Christie, and Jeb Bush, who converted to Catholicism, his wife’s faith, some twenty years ago. For them, the issue is not one of religious bigotry, such as John F. Kennedy faced in his 1960 campaign, with insinuations of adherence to secret Papist instructions. In a way, it’s the opposite: the very public agenda of the all too authentic Pope Francis.

Early signs of trouble came in the summer of 2013, when the new Pope, speaking with reporters about gays in the Church, asked, “Who am I to judge?” The conservative wing of the Party had relied on his predecessors to do just that. Then he proved much less reticent about issuing a verdict on capitalism. In an apostolic exhortation issued at the end of 2013, he labelled trickle-down economic theories “crude and naïve.” The problems of the poor, he said, had to be “radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality.” That went quite a ways beyond the sort of tepid proposals for job creation and “family formation” that Romney made on the Midway, and the response from Republicans has involved a certain amount of rationalization. “The guy is from Argentina—they haven’t had real capitalism,” Paul



Ryan, Romney's former running mate, and a Catholic, said.

"It's sometimes very difficult to listen to the Pope," Santorum noted last month, after Francis, in remarks about "responsible parenting"—widely interpreted as an opening for a discussion on family planning—said that there was no need for Catholics to be "like rabbits." Santorum echoed Ryan's suggestion that Argentine exceptionalism might be at work: "I don't know what the Pope was referring to there. Maybe he's speaking to people in the Third World." On that front, when it emerged that Francis had been instrumental in the diplomatic breakthrough with Cuba, Jeb Bush criticized the deal, and Senator Marco Rubio, also a Catholic, said that he'd like the Pope to "take up the cause of freedom and democracy."

As if all that weren't enough, His Holiness is preparing an encyclical on climate change, to be released in advance of his visit to the United States later this year. In January, he said of global warming, "For the most part, it is man who continuously slaps down nature." Stephen Moore, of the Heritage Foundation, has written, "On the environment, the pope has allied himself with the far left." Actually, Francis is very much in the center in terms of scientific opinion, but the leading potential G.O.P. contenders, with the possible exception of Christie, sit somewhere on the climate-change-denial-passivity spectrum—Jeb Bush has said that he is a "skeptic" as to whether the problem is man-made.

In recent decades, liberal Catholic politicians were the ones with a papal problem; both Mario Cuomo and John Kerry had to reckon with the prospect of excommunication for their support of abortion-rights laws. John Paul II, meanwhile, was a favorite of conservatives; despite his often subtle views, he became at times little more than a symbol of anti-Communism and a certain set of social strictures. He cemented an alliance, in the political realm, between conservative Catholics and evangelicals. (Rubio also attends an evangelical church.) Abortion was a significant part of that story. By contrast, the Franciscan moment will push some Republican candidates to make decisions and to have conversations that they would rather avoid.

It will also offer a chance to address the knotty American idea that faith is an incontrovertible component of political authenticity. (Why is the Romney who thinks about God the "real" one?) The corollary should be that nothing is as inauthentic as faith that is only opportunistically professed, something that this Pope, who has extended a hand to atheists, seems to know. Still, the campaign will be defined not by theological questions but by political ones, prominent among them inequality and climate change. Both can have spiritual dimensions and speak to moral issues, such as our obligations to one another. But neither can be solved by faith alone.

—Amy Davidson

POLITICAL NOTES FROM ALL OVER HUMAN FILIBUSTER



Several hours after the news broke, last Tuesday night, that Sheldon Silver would be relinquishing his post as the Speaker of the New York State Assembly, an e-mail arrived in these offices from someone calling himself Fake Sheldon Silver. "We've made a determination that it would be acceptable to meet with you at this time," the note read. Its author proposed a meal at Zafis Luncheonette, on Grand Street, down the block from the real Silver's apartment. Fake Sheldon Silver is a parodist, tweeting the ostensible musings (@ShellySilver) of the tight-lipped politician as a running critique of Albany obfuscation and graft. (Example: "Let's begin the 237th Legislative Session by giving a warm welcome to our newest colleagues and a fond farewell to the molesters and felons.") After five years of anonymity and some two thousand quips, many of them retweeted by the Albany elite (such as it is), the parodist was ready for an unveiling, and perhaps a bow. Silver's re-

cent arrest, on corruption charges involving millions of dollars funnelled through his side gig as a personal-injury lawyer, seemed to spell the end not only of a two-decade-long career in power brokering but also of an extended piece of political performance art.

"The popular speculation is that it's a staffer in the chamber, and obviously someone with a very good working knowledge of the Jewish tradition," Jimmy Vielkind, the Albany bureau chief for Capital New York, said the other day of the parodist's identity.

The man who showed up at Zafis was neither Vielkind nor a chamber staffer. In fact, he said that he'd been to Albany only about half a dozen times, and during the peak of his tweeting activity, in 2012 and 2013, he was living in Cambridge, where he taught urban planning at M.I.T. and Harvard. His name is Aaron Naparstek, and he is best known as a progressive transportation advocate—the founder of the influential Streetsblog. It was the Democratic Assembly's stonewalling on congestion pricing, in 2008, that first drew his attention upstate. He'd thought briefly of running a campaign to oust his own assemblywoman, in Brooklyn, but friends talked him out of it. "Everything about my personality is ill-suited to it," he conceded.

Instead, he helped found a nonprofit called Reinvent Albany, which led to his being seated, at a public forum in 2010, within feet of Speaker Silver, whom he now calls "a walking human filibuster."

"He was wearing this dark three-piece suit, and, not to be mean to Shelly, but he was rounder and shorter than I thought," Naparstek recalled. "He was like this dark, round thing in the middle of the room. It felt like a black hole. All the light and matter and information in the room was being sucked into Shelly, and nothing could escape." He continued, "I loved the notion that here you have this guy called the Speaker, and what is the most salient descriptive point about Shelly? He doesn't speak! All of his power derives from not speaking as long as possible, and then, at the very end, either saying yes or no—and usually no. I just felt like there was inherent humor there."

Naparstek, who is Jewish but only haphazardly observant, said that he had enjoyed his vicarious devotion. "I really made sure, like, no tweeting on the Sabbath," he said.

He had brought to the luncheonette a laptop with photos of his target, taken with a BlackBerry at the Philadelphia International Airport in the fall of 2011. "I was flying to my cousin's wedding,"



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**RANDOM
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he said. He ended up in line at a ticket gate behind a dishevelled man who turned out to be Silver. As the *Post* reported in 2013, Silver made an occasional habit of flying to Albany through Philadelphia and Washington, D.C., in order to amass more frequent-flier miles—at taxpayers' expense. "He couldn't get the seat he wanted. He could not have seemed less powerful."

Naparstek picked at his tuna salad (Fake Shelly's verdict: nice and soggy), and the real Sheldon Silver appeared on the restaurant's television screen, hounded by reporters as he exited the State Capitol. "He's kind of got that Philadelphia Airport shuffle going," Naparstek said. "I feel for him. In a weird, sick way, I do." He added, "I really never thought he would be of the walking-out-in-handcuffs variety. I had this notion that Shelly's last tweets would be from the afterlife." Silver, for his part, has said that he will be vindicated at trial.

—Ben McGrath

ONLY IN NEW YORK TALK TO ME



Not long ago, Heather Quinlan stood outside the Times Square Arts Center, on Forty-third Street, where she was preparing to interview Joe Franklin, the longtime New York talk-show host and self-proclaimed "King of Nostalgia," who died last month, at eighty-eight. Quinlan was making a documentary about the New York accent—"If These Knishes Could Talk"—for which she had interviewed, among others, Pete Hamill and a Korean man who sounds like Robert De Niro. To collect samples, she occasionally stood on street corners with a sign that said, "Do you have a New York accent? Then talk to me!" Fewer and fewer New Yorkers do, but in sixty years on radio and television Franklin had interviewed, by his estimate, more than three hundred thousand people, many of whom still had it. "I'm a little nervous," Quinlan said. "I heard he's been in this office for, like, five hundred years."

It had actually been closer to ten, but

not much had changed to alter this magazine's assessment, in 1971, of Franklin's then office: "If it were a person, it would be a bum." The new space had no windows and was filled with ephemera: a "Legally Blonde 2" DVD, six empty shipping boxes, two Christmas stockings, a bar of soap in the shape of a hot dog, two stuffed animals (rabbit, Dalmatian), and a healthy portion of Franklin's collection of a hundred thousand vaudeville records. Stacks of 16-mm. film reels began on the floor and stopped near the ceiling. "Know who had a desk like mine?" Franklin asked, seated behind several piles that seemed like they might conceal a desk. "Albert Einstein."

Quinlan fastened a microphone to Franklin's lapel—he had grabbed a suit jacket from the top of a pile of board games—and asked him for a brief autobiography. "I was born in the Bronx, and my best friend was Tony Curtis," Franklin began. "He became famous for one line: 'Yonda stands da castle of my foddia.' But he never said it. He had one of the most pronounced Bronx accents in show business, but after three or four movies the accent was gone."

"Knishes" offers a broader obituary: the New York accent is being displaced, a casualty of internal migration and television, where actors work hard to sound like they're from Des Moines or Topeka. Quinlan had gone looking for bastions of survival. A deaf man from Coney Island told her that locals sign more rapidly and with a regional vernacular, referring to fellow New Yorkers by raising their arms as if they were riding a crowded subway. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon found that only New Yorkers replaced "something" with "suttin" on Twitter.

"The accent is almost nonexistent now," Franklin told Quinlan. "I miss it." A phone rang somewhere in his office, which had three landlines, in addition to a purple neon Fashion Girl Chic telephone. Several phone books sat in their plastic wrapping. "Hello!" Franklin yelled into a receiver. *SLAM*. He had picked up the wrong line. "Hello! Who? I'm being interviewed. Call me in half an hour." *SLAM*. He turned back to the camera. "Accents are an ingredient you put on the steak to make it more flavorful," he said. "I remember when I interviewed Julie Andrews, she was in 'My Fair Lady'"—Franklin's talk show went on

the air in 1951 and ran until 1993; his radio show ended with his death—"and what a kick I got out of her when she was just a Cockney, a flower girl. Then somebody coached her, and toward the end she could own the flower shop."

The phone rang. "Hello!" *SLAM*. "Hello! No no! Half an hour!" *SLAM*. Another ring. "Hello! No no! Leave me alone!" *SLAM*.

Franklin tried to name his favorite New York accents. "Johnny Carson could do one, but he's dead," Franklin said. "Jimmy Durante, without the big nose and the accent, wouldn't have been Jimmy Durante." He paused to think for a moment, but was stumped.

"Anybody else? Who's left?" he asked. "They're all dead," a friend responded.



Joe Franklin

"It's true," Franklin said. "The average age of my friends is deceased." The phone rang again. "Hello!" *SLAM*. "Hello! I know! They're interviewing me about my accent. Where's your accent from?" A woman was on the line, but her answer was indecipherable. "Don't forget me," he said into the phone. "Don't forget me." *SLAM*.

—Reeves Wiedeman

D.I.Y. DEPT. DOOR TO DOOR



The architect Peter Pennoyer designs town houses, country houses, and beach houses for the rich and aesthetically conservative. His face is framed by a Tom Brokavian sweep of silver hair,

and he favors loafers and spread-collar oxford shirts. Pennoyer's friend Sigourney Weaver once wrote, "Like a summer's day . . . his homes seem to have existed forever." This is intentional. "As an architecture student at Columbia, I was quite taken with modernism," Pennoyer said recently. "I did a loft once that was completely minimalist—no doors, white resin floor." After a while, though, "those experiments came to seem arbitrary, and I returned to Greek and Roman forms, which is where I now draw much of my inspiration." He is known for his scholarly attention to detail: knurled doorknobs, cabled fluting, pineapple finials.

In 2004, while designing a town house on East Seventy-ninth Street, Pennoyer encountered a novel challenge: "The clients requested a greater number of mezuzahs than I had ever heard of." Pennoyer is Episcopalian. "I was familiar with mezuzahs, but I knew very little about them. I started doing research."

In Deuteronomy, God instructs the Israelites to affix His holy words "upon the doorposts of thy house." Eventually, rabbis specified which words, exactly, and how to affix them: the modern custom is to place a parchment scroll inside a small decorative case—a mezuzah—and screw it to the doorjamb at an angle. Some secular Jews go mezuzahless or make do with a single mezuzah on the front door; Orthodox Jews, or those with a liberal parchment budget, mark every room larger than sixteen square cubits. Pennoyer's clients were quite observant. "They wanted one on every door except bathrooms and closets," Pennoyer said. "Fifty-two in all."

The Talmud is silent on the question of mezuzah design, and, to Pennoyer's dismay, contemporary vendors seemed inclined toward kitsch. "We wanted it to look exactly right," he said. "We tried Manhattan Judaica shops, online auction sites, MezuzahStore.com. We could not find anything that wasn't terribly, unacceptably ugly." Pennoyer made a few drawings, and the clients chose a design that was formal but not ornate—a stripped-down four-inch Doric column made of brass, to be mortised into the doorframes. A metal shop in Brooklyn made the mezuzahs



"I'm hoping an internship will lead to full-time copying."

and shipped them uptown, and a rabbi said a blessing over each one as it was installed.

Eventually, Pennoyer designed a line of artisanal mezuzahs, which he hopes to sell on the Internet. "I never set out to be a mezuzah salesman, but why not?" he said. Pennoyer's firm now sends digital files to Lowe Hardware, a high-end metalworking company in Maine. "They have this machine that is essentially an automated lathe," Jim Taylor, a partner at Pennoyer's firm, said. "They feed in a cylinder of brass, and out comes the exact shape you've designed."

Pennoyer recently purchased a 3-D printer for his own office, on Park Avenue South. He uses it to print scale models of upcoming projects as well as life-size prototypes of custom doorknobs and cornices and mezuzahs. Unlike the lathe in Maine, his machine is additive: it builds from the bottom up, using thin layers of hard plastic resin. "It's a way of holding the thing in your hand, so you know what you're going to get," Pennoyer said. Once the client approves it, the files are forwarded to Lowe and the shape is reproduced in metal.

One recent day, Pennoyer agreed to show off his printer. The machine was in a back hallway, near the mailroom; it was labelled *Objet Eden500V* and looked like a miniature black coffin. Dan Berkman, the office's 3-D-printing maven, brought a thumb drive from his desk and inserted it in the machine. "That walk is the only low-tech step in the process," said Pennoyer, who had rolled up his sleeves for the demonstration. The printer began to spit out the specified shape: a life-size model of an anthemion, a floral ornament in the Greek Revival style, which would sit atop a cornice.

Earlier, to make sure his side business in Judaica was kosher, Pennoyer had asked Berkman, who is Jewish, whether he knew any rabbis. Berkman suggested his wife's cousin Julian Cook, a Reform rabbi in Denver. Taylor sent Cook an e-mail with a few renderings attached and asked "whether our design meets the generally accepted standards for a mezuzah." Cook responded, "I looked at your photos and drawing carefully (this is very nice, by the way) and it's absolutely fine."

—Andrew Marantz

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

A FAIR DAY'S WAGE

It's no secret that the years since the Great Recession have been hard on American workers. Though unemployment has finally dipped below six per cent, real wages for most have barely budged since 2007. Indeed, the whole century so far has been tough: wages haven't grown much since 2000. So it was big news when, last month, Aetna's C.E.O., Mark Bertolini, announced that the company's lowest-paid workers would get a substantial raise—from twelve to sixteen dollars an hour, in some cases—as well as improved medical coverage. Bertolini didn't stop there. He said that it was not “fair” for employees of a Fortune 50 company to be struggling to make ends meet. He explicitly linked the decision to the broader debate about inequality, mentioning that he had given copies of Thomas Piketty's “Capital in the Twenty-first Century” to all his top executives. “Companies are not just money-making machines,” he told me last week. “For the good of the social order, these are the kinds of investments we should be willing to make.”

Such rhetoric harks back to an earlier era in U.S. labor relations. These days, most of the benefits of economic growth go to people at the top of the income ladder. But in the postwar era, in particular, the wage-setting process was shaped by norms of fairness and internal equity. These norms were bolstered by the strength of the U.S. labor movement, which emphasized the idea of the “living” or “family” wage—that someone doing a full day's work should be paid enough to live on. But they were embraced by many in the business class, too. Economists are typically skeptical that these kinds of norms play any role in setting wages. If you want to know why wages grew fast in the nineteen-fifties, they would say, look to the economic boom and an American workforce that didn't have to compete with foreign workers. But this is too narrow a view: the fact that the benefits of economic growth in the postwar era were widely shared had a lot to do with the assumption that companies were responsible not only to their shareholders but also to their workers. That's why someone like Peter Drucker, the dean of management theorists, could argue that no company's C.E.O. should be paid more than twenty times what its average employee earned.

That's not to imply that there aren't solid business reasons for paying workers more. A substantial body of research suggests that it can make sense to pay above-market wages—economists call them “efficiency wages.” If you pay people better, they are more likely to stay, which saves money; job

turnover was costing Aetna a hundred and twenty million dollars a year. Better-paid employees tend to work harder, too. The most famous example in business history is Henry Ford's decision, in 1914, to start paying his workers the then handsome sum of five dollars a day. Working on the Model T assembly line was an unpleasant job. Workers had been quitting in huge numbers or simply not showing up for work. Once Ford started paying better, job turnover and absenteeism plummeted, and productivity and profits rose.

Subsequent research has borne out the wisdom of Ford's approach. As the authors of a just published study of pay and performance in a hotel chain wrote, “Increases in wages do, in fact, pay for themselves.” Zeynep Ton, a business-school professor at M.I.T., shows in her recent book, “The Good Jobs Strategy,” that one of the reasons retailers like Trader Joe's and Costco have flourished is that, instead of relentlessly cost-cutting, they pay their employees relatively well, invest heavily in training them, and design their operations to encourage employee initiative. Their upfront labor costs may be higher, but, as Ton told me, “these companies end up with motivated, capable workers, better service, and increased sales.” Bertolini—who, as it happens, once worked on a Ford rear-axle assembly line—makes a similar argument. “It's hard for people to be fully engaged with customers when they're worrying about how to put food on the table,” he told me. “So I don't buy the idea that paying people well means sacrificing short-term earnings.”

That hardly seems like a radical position. But it certainly makes Bertolini an outlier in today's corporate America. Since the nineteen-seventies, a combination of market forces, declining union strength, and ideological changes has led to what the economist Alan Krueger has described as a steady “erosion of the norms, institutions and practices that maintain fairness in the U.S. job market.” As a result, while companies these days tend to pay lavishly for talent on the high end—Bertolini made eight million dollars in 2013—they tend to treat frontline workers as disposable commodities.

This isn't because companies are having trouble making money: corporate America, if not the rest of the economy, has done just fine over the past five years. It's that all the rewards went into profits and executive salaries, rather than wages. That arrangement is the result not of some inevitable market logic but of a corporate ethos that says companies should pay workers as little as they can, and no more. This is what Bertolini seems to be challenging. His move may well turn out to be merely a one-off, rather than a harbinger of bigger change. But inequality and the shrinking middle class have become abiding preoccupations on Main Street and in Washington. It's only fair that these concerns have finally reached the executive suite.

—James Surowiecki





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LOTTERY TICKETS

Grieving for a husband.

BY ELIZABETH ALEXANDER



"Self-Portrait as a Young Man," by Ficare Ghebreyesus.

The story begins on a beautiful April morning when a man wakes exhausted and returns to sleep in his thirteen-year-old son's trundle bed, declaring, "This is the most comfortable bed I have ever slept in!" Or it begins when the wife says goodbye to the man a few hours later, walking in front of his car switching her hips a bit, a kiss blown as she heads to her office and he continues on to his painting studio.

Or it begins as he packs a tote bag with the usual slim thermos of strong coffee made in an Italian stovetop moka pot, a larger thermos of cold water, two tangerines, a package of Nat Sherman MCD cigarettes, and a plastic sack of raw almonds. The tote is astral blue and printed

with Giotto angels. Off to his studio for a day of painting. Then the two children will walk down Edgehill Road from the bus stop like burros under their knapsacks, and his wife will prepare dinner while listening to Thelonus Monk and sipping from a glass of white wine that he's poured for her. The thirteen-year-old does his homework and the twelve-year-old practices his drumming.

I am the wife. I am the wife of fifteen years. I am the plumpish wife, the pretty wife, the loving wife, the smart wife, the American wife. I am eternally his wife.

Perhaps the story begins with the fistful of lottery tickets he bought two days before he died, which I discovered weeks later, when they fluttered out of the pages

of one of the many books he was reading.

Or it begins when I meet him, sixteen years before. That was always a good story: an actual *coup de foudre*, a bolt of lightning, love at first sight. I felt a visceral torque, I would tell people, a literal churn of my organs: not butterflies, not arousal; rather, a not unpleasant rotation of my innards, as never before. Lightning struck and did not curdle the cream but instead turned it to sweet, silken butter. Lightning turned sand into glass.

Maybe, though, the story began in the winter of 1961, when two women were pregnant, one in Asmara, Eritrea, and the other in Harlem, U.S.A.; one with her sixth child, one with her first. The East African son would arrive on March 21, 1962, on the most hallowed day of the zodiac. It is the beginning and the end of the astrological calendar, and so it is said that children born on March 21st are ancient souls who possess the wonder and innocence of newborns. The American child, a girl, would come on May 30th, into the chatter and buzz of Gemini, in Gotham.

When I met Ficare Ghebreyesus, in New Haven, in the late spring of 1996, the first thing he wanted to do was show me his art. He was living in an unfinished loft where he slept and painted when he was not cooking at the Eritrean restaurant that he owned and ran with two of his brothers. The restaurant was named Caffè Adulis, in homage to the ancient port city on the Red Sea that is now an archeological site, one of Africa's great "lost cities." Pliny the Elder wrote of Adulis, which he said was founded by "Egyptian slaves fleeing their masters." Ficare always said it meant "city of free men."

As Ficare showed me his work, he talked about his family. His late father, Gebreyesus Tessema, was a judge who was exiled hundreds of miles away from home when he refused to tamper with his judicial decisions to suit the wishes of the dictator. His mother, Zememesh Berhe, came from a family of many sisters and two brothers, tough Coptic Christian highlanders. Together, they had seven children: one, the eldest son, lost to the long independence war with Ethiopia, Ficare at the No. 6 position. Their language was Tigrinya, an Afro-Asiatic tongue closely related to the ancient South

Semitic Ge'ez and spoken in Eritrea and its diaspora, as well as in northern Ethiopia. His full name, Ficremariam Ghebreyesus, means "lover of Mary" and "servant of Jesus." The abbreviated Ficre means "love."

On a Thursday night at the end of March, 2011, I bring an unexpected guest home to stay with us, my artist friend Lorna, who's spoken at Yale, where I teach, that afternoon. When Lorna and I arrive home, the house is lighted and glowing, and tea is brewing in the black Japanese cast-iron pot. Ficre has put raw almonds in a small celadon bowl. It is late; our sons, Solomon and Simon, are sleeping. We are so pleased to live like this, organized and open and welcoming when friends pass through Hamden, the hamlet where we recently moved to live in a tan stucco Arts and Crafts house surrounded by a garden. Ficre fell in love with the property, which reminded him of the African "compound" where he grew up amid flowers, inside walls his mother painted apricot, spring-sky blue, rose violet, and butter yellow.

The next morning, I organize the children for school and send them off and Ficre makes coffee when Lorna rises shortly after. We three drink our cappuccinos under the gazebo. Hanging inside is a mobile that Ficre fashioned from some slender, twisty branches that blew down in the yard after a storm. The mobile turns gently in the breeze. The morning is gray, and the yard smells of the fresh, damp earth of early spring.

As we walk toward the house, something makes us look back into the yard over our shoulders. There is a giant hawk sitting on the branch of our hundred-year-old oak tree, eviscerating and devouring a squirrel.

We freeze to watch. The raptor is utterly focussed on its task. I watch Ficre and Lorna scrutinizing, their artist's eyes recording what they see. The hawk attends to its business undisturbed. It is rapacious; it takes what it wants. The bloody ribbons of the squirrel's entrails hang off the branch as the hawk eats the entire remains of the hapless rodent in about five minutes.

Ficre tells us he has seen the bird the day before, with the children, and shows us a short video he took on his phone of the creature on the same branch, eat-

ing another squirrel. I have seen a hawk a few times but never one so intent on its survival, never seen predation up close and in action. It is pure and elemental, necessarily violent, riveting, nature itself. We watch for as long as we can before we have to go off to the duties of our days.

Some weeks later, on his bureau, I find an acrostic that Ficre made, which exhausted variations on the word "hawk." He'd assigned numbers to the letters and then assigned those numbers to lottery tickets, which he had bought by the dozens and secreted in the pages of the books he was reading.

Saturday: the surprise fiftieth-birthday party that Solomon and Simon have planned for their father is upon us. We try to go about our business as usual while surreptitious e-mails and calls come in with last-minute details and snafus. My brother stopped at the bakery in Bridgeport to pick up the cake and found the bakery closed. A friend from New York is waiting at a café downtown until the coast is clear. It is supposed to storm, and a friend from Boston is not sure that she can make it on the road. Finally, Ficre and the boys leave the house and he takes them to see "The Hunger Games."

I scurry around tidying up. In a few hours, friends begin to arrive, decked out and giddy. Solo and Simon and I have secured a New Haven party treat, the Big Green Truck: a truck with a wood-burning oven for making pizzas with a cavalcade of toppings, plus salad, and gelato, and espresso. The pizza makers are in on the secret and park the truck out of sight by the side of the house.

Solo texts from the road: *We are leaving downtown. We pulled out of the parking lot. We're on Whitney Avenue.* Everyone gathers in the library, rustling and giggling, until we hear Ficre's key in the door. Surprise! His face wide open with joy as he goes to each one of us, *You*, and *You*, and *You!* We laugh, we talk, we eat, and we dance.

That night, he goes to sleep literally with a smile on his face. I gently poke him, thinking he is awake and playing sleep to entertain me, or still falling asleep, reviewing the evening in his mind. But he is in what the poet Léopold Sédar Senghor called "a deep Negro sleep."

The next evening, something urgent



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and sharp comes over Ficre: he has to leave the house, right away, he tells me. He has to buy a lottery ticket; he has a number, and a feeling. He is agitated, so certain is he that his number is going to win, and win big. I tell him gently he is being a little silly and let's just have dinner, but he jumps in the car, drives off, and comes back with what I later find out is a hundred lottery tickets. "I have to win it for you," he says. "I have to win the lottery for you."

On Tuesday, I come home late from the university. The boys are asleep and Ficre is on the couch watching television, waiting for me, drowsy. He has promised Solo a sleepover. He goes to Solo's trundle bed and I go to our bed, and we call out good night to each other down the hall. How beautiful, the way that children sleep so peacefully that their parents' voices do not wake them.

The next morning Ficre wakes exhausted, but happy. "This is the most comfortable bed I have ever slept in!" he says.

Then sleep some more, I whisper, and delay leaving home, pattering, so we can be together.

He feels better when he wakes again. We drink our coffee and chat, as on a million mornings. He drives me to work. I've just heard about a poetry reading on campus from a book of new translations of the sacred poetry of the Kabbalah, but it is scheduled at the same time I'm supposed to pick up the children from school to take them to the orthodontist.

"You have to hear the sacred poetry of the Kabbalah!" Ficre says to me. "You are an artist, and you need it—I will take the children to the orthodontist!"

The room where the reading is held is packed. The words resonate and sound to me oracular and true, though their meaning is mysterious:

Windows of worship
Windows of beckoning
Windows of weeping

Windows of joy...
Windows of bearing
Windows of birth

*and he saw—
windows without number and end.*

The program runs long, so I tiptoe out to get home as promised.

From his bedroom-window lookout spot, Simon sees me approach and comes

running downstairs to the door. News from the family in diaspora: an older cousin in Montpellier, France, will not join us for the holiday as planned, because his three-year-old daughter is contagious. I go inside and call to my husband: "Fiiii-kiii!"

"I'll get him!" Simon sings.

And then Simon is screaming. I run downstairs and see Ficre slumped on the floor, the treadmill still running. There is a raw slash where skin has come off his head. I think, *The treadmill was set too fast; he fell and hit his head.* Which he had. I think, *He will have a horrible concussion.* There is a small amount of yellow fluid pooled next to him. Strangely, I see no blood. Some months later, Solo comes home from school and says, *I know what the yellow liquid was. It was plasma. Blood separates into red and yellow, plasma and protein.*

I tell Simon, *Leave, get the phone, get your brother, call 911, bring me the phone,* and I am alone with Ficre. His eyes face mine directly. He is so warm; he is the right temperature. Half of his face seems slack to me, so I then think, *He has had a stroke and that is worse than a concussion, but he will recover.*

I tell the children, *Go upstairs, wait for the ambulance, bring them down quickly when they come.*

I am alone again with Ficre. It is just the two of us. I speak to him, low and urgent and gentle. I hold him carefully and try to wake him with my words and touch. I breathe into his warm mouth. I don't try to lift him, lest his spine be injured. I am certain he can hear me.

At the hospital, the medics rush him into the emergency room, and the doctors usher me into the roomette where they work. I keep my hand on his calf the whole time. He is still warm. They cut off his clothes. As his body is exposed, a doctor in a turban closes the curtains.

They pump him and jump him. They keep doing it. "Anyone have any other ideas?" the doctor shouts, after they have tried and tried. And then he looks straight and deep into my eyes and says the words they say in the movies that are nonetheless the only words: *We did everything we could do for him.* Which I saw. Later on, I will learn it was 6:54 P.M., Wednesday, April 4, 2012.

The penis, which is mine alone, lies

sleeping on his thigh, nestled in its hair, and that is what I remember of his body, after the emergency-room doctor met my eyes and made his pronouncement. Him, still him, still Ficare, still a him, the last trace of him. The penis with which he made the human beings who are our children is sign and symbol and substance of what I have lost.

I lie atop him and cover his body with my body. After a time that cannot be measured, someone I do not know comes and puts her arms around my shoulders and gently, gently leads me off and away from Ficare.

And then the children arrive, and I am waiting for them at the entrance, and I tell them that Daddy is dead.

Where is Daddy? We go to a room to see his body—not to see him, to see his body, for when we go in it is his body but not him, in a hospital gown, under covers. We touch and hug and weep over the body that no longer houses him. It is somehow not frightening to see this body. In these moments it still belongs to us. The body is no longer warm. Our wails are one wail. We know when we want to leave the room.

When he was sixteen years old, he walked across his country through killing fields to escape. He walked into the dust of Khartoum. He was a refugee in Sudan, in Italy, in Germany, and in the United States, where he ended up living in New Haven for far longer than he had ever lived anywhere else. He became an African-American man, but he was not the descendant of slaves. He washed dishes in Italy, attended school before he knew a word of the language in a Germany so racially hostile it almost broke him. He went years without seeing his parents. His parents and his community built him to survive. But it was not without price.

His big heart burst. The autopsy later tells us his arteries were blocked nearly completely, despite the fact that he was slim and energetic and ate yogurt and blueberries and flaxseed, despite the fact that he passed stress tests with flying colors. I learn that severe heart disease is first discovered in many sufferers only when they drop dead. He could never quit smoking, though he tried and tried, over and over and over. Heart disease is the lead-

ing cause of death in the United States.

He was probably dead before he hit the ground, the emergency-room doctor and the coroner and a cardiologist I later speak with tell me. That may be why there was no blood on the floor, despite his head wound and the scalp's vascularity. He might have felt strange, the doctors told me, before what they call "the cardiac event," but not for more than a flash. One tells me he is certain Ficare saw my face as he died. We are meant to take comfort in this knowledge, if knowledge it is.

I breathed into his mouth. He was supple. The 911 operator asked if my husband was breathing and I could not say. The air around him was warm and vaporous. How many times that day and in the days and weeks and months that followed did I say "my husband." My husband died unexpectedly. I just lost my husband. "Lost" implies we are looking, he might be found.

I lost my husband. Where is he? I often wonder. As I set out on some small adventure, heading for some new place, somewhere he does not know, I think, I must call him, think, I must tell him, think, *What would he think?* Think what he thinks. Know what he thinks.

When I held him in the basement, he was himself, Ficare.

When I held him in the hospital as they worked and cut off his clothes, he was himself.

When they cleaned his body and brought his body for us to say goodbye, he had left his body, though it still belonged to us.

His body was colder than it had been, though not ice-cold, or stiff and hard. His spirit had clearly left as it had not left when we found him on the basement floor and I knew that he could hear us.

Now I know for sure that the soul is an evanescent thing and the body is its temporary container, because I saw it. I saw the body with the soul in it, I saw the body with the soul leaving, and I saw the body with the soul gone.

When we first became lovers, we entered a three-day, three-night vortex. Night One I slept Senghor's "deep Negro sleep" for what seemed like the first time ever, lifelong insomniac

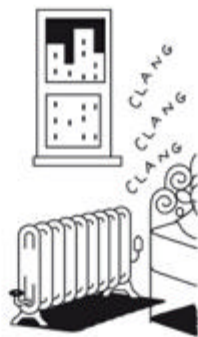
no more. Night Two I burned with high fever and dreamed of my grandmother and a cherry tree, the only fruit she ever ate to excess. The next morning, Ficare gave me small sips of cold blackcurrant juice and rosehip tea to make me well. Night Three my fever broke and so did my menses, more blood than I had ever let in my life, all over the bed, a trail across the room, the bathroom floor, and in the tub. He cleaned it up; I did not feel abashed. Then he had to go to Washington, where there was to be an exhibition of photographs of Eritrea that he had taken during the war and just after independence. The last thing he put in his bag was my first book of poems.

He returned to New Haven five days later with a present for me: a honey-drenched honeycomb, from a visit to Luray Caverns. Its structure was ancient and iconic. *Did you know that honey was found in King Tutankhamen's tomb and is still edible?* he said. *And that honey was found in sealed jars in Pompeii?* We marvelled at the honeycomb's simple construction and deceptive strength, and held it up to behold its incomparable gold. We looked all around us through the honey's gold light. Then we ate it.

Why did he buy the lottery ticket with my name on it? Why was he so angry when he lost?

The day he died, the four of us were exactly the same height, just over five feet nine. We'd measured the boys in the pantry doorway the week before. It seemed a perfect symmetry, a whole family the same size but in different shapes. Now the children grow past me and past their father. They seem to grow by the day; they sprout like beanstalks toward the sky. Simon's anklebones appear shiny at his pants'hems. He complains his feet hurt, and indeed his toes have grown and are pushing against the tips of his shoes. His growing seems avid, fevered. It feels like the insistent force of life itself.

Ficare and I used to walk together in Grove Street Cemetery, where he is now buried, where I will one day join him. The Yale art historian Sylvia Boone is buried there, too. Her great work is about



Mende art, and is called "Radiance from the Waters." Her gravestone is a West African wonder in rosy marble etched with a seashell and a Soweï mask she'd written about. In her earlier book about visiting West Africa, she wrote that travellers should always commit the "charming, hopeful, irrational" act of buying a lottery ticket in a new country. She called it buying "a chance." It will make you feel lucky, as if anything could happen, even when "you *know* you will not be there for the drawing."

You were six and your brother was four, my mother said. *The whole day passed, a lovely day, and at the end I knew something was different, but I wasn't quite sure what. Ah, that's it! I said to myself. Nobody cried today! For the first time in six years, nobody cried!*

We used to laugh at that story when my boys were young and the cries would come and go, dried up by the vanished sunlight like summer storms, fast-finished but ever-present.

I thought of that phrase tonight. "Nobody cried today." It is ten months, almost one year. I did not cry today. I cried yesterday. I may well cry tomorrow. But I did not cry today, and neither did either of my sons, though mostly I am the one who still cries. It is not an accomplishment, just an observation, but one that marks the passage of time.

The next day, Simon weeps, remembering the day his father died, remembering being the first to find him, wondering if dying hurt him, remembering that the last thing his father said to him before he went downstairs to the treadmill was a cheerful "Check on me."

You did check, I tell him. And then I came, and then Brother. And we were there with him when his soul left the room. He was in his own home, and he was with us.

The tears subside, and melt into a few strong shudders. When I look at the video Ficre made of the children watching the rapacious hawk, I hear the light tinkling bells in Simon's voice and think, He was so young that April.

A bit later, in the shower, Simon calls out to me, *I was a ten in sadness when I was crying. Mommy, but now I am a six.*

Whoops, he says, it just went down to five.

He comes out of the shower and puts on his pajamas.

Now it's just a three.

He brushes his teeth.

Now it's all gone, he says. We were with Daddy when he died.

A year later, it is time to make decisions in the studio. It has been photographed exactly as he left it, each table surface a still-life, each palette a painting unto itself. The paintings have been sorted according to size, dusted, and labelled, all eight hundred and eighty-two of them, plus the sketches, and the photographs, and the small metal sculptures.

The idea of throwing away his paintbrushes makes me queasy. They are somehow biological, his DNA in the brush fibres. I find a box of the very best paintbrushes, which are made of sable. I have long been fascinated with the story of the frozen woolly mammoth, how scientists used a blow dryer to thaw it and extract DNA from its flesh and fur. Now I read they have found liquid blood inside a ten-thousand-year-old woolly mammoth. They will extract the DNA and eventually fertilize and plant an egg inside an elephant. Ficre's DNA is everywhere in the studio, and in the paintbrushes he held for so many hours.

After the studio, I clean deeper in the never-ending house, facing it bit by bit. I clean my pantry cabinets and find Ficre's baking supplies: two brands of yeast and powdered-milk solids, wheat and white and rye and spelt bread flours, rice flour to experiment with gluten-free bread. I throw away all the expired flours. They smell ever so slightly rancid, but not unpleasantly so. They smell biological. I am reminded that grain is alive, a host for bacteria. Things grow and live in it.

Soon after that, we walk forward into a new story, each of us carrying the old ones across our shoulders in bandanas tied to sticks. My sons and I move to New York City. Today, we look out our window at the Hudson River and wait for another hurricane as the sky turns lavender and orange, Ficre colors. When the rain is most dramatic, we feel him close. The boys grow taller than everyone around them and become young men.

Something is fading: not the memory of him but the press of memory, the closeness of him. He is somewhere in

the atmosphere, but also not. He is fifty and I am fifty-one. He is a photograph in the living room; he is, for the moment, still.

On the streets of New York, I see people who remind me of him in glances: Ficre elderly, in a favorite overcoat and a gentleman's hat. Ficre an African man walking the city. I see a lovely bald brown head, or a slightly springing stride. He moved lightly and valued light-footedness, as he valued sotto voce. How he despised needlessly loud voices. There are flashes of him in this complex metropolis, but he is not here.

Death sits in the comfortable chair in the corner of my new bedroom, smoking a cigarette. It is a he, sinuous and sleek, wearing a felt-brimmed hat. He is there when I wake in the middle of the night, sitting quietly, his smoke a visible curl in the New York lights that come in between the venetian-blind slats.

At first, I am startled to see him. He sits so near, is so at home. But he doesn't move toward me, he simply cohabits. And so, eventually, I return to sleep. He isn't going anywhere, but he isn't going to take me, either. In the morning, the chair is empty.

I dream we are moving, my family of four: Lizzy, Ficre, Solomon, and Simon. It is light and easy. We laugh with the boys as we sort through and throw things away. Ficre carries and moves large bags and objects—"your African ox," as he used to call himself, sturdy and purposeful. The boys move like oxen as well. We are glad to be going wherever we are going.

Now it is just the two of us walking a long, gently curved road, holding hands. At a fork in the road, Ficre lets my hand go and waves me on. *You have to keep walking, Lizzy, he says. I know it is the only truth, so I walk.*

I look back. I look back. I can still see him, smiling and waving me on.

It was the two of us walking the road and now he has let my hand go.

I walk. I can always see him. His size does not change as I move forward: he is five feet nine and a half, exactly right. I can still feel the feel of my hand in his hand as I walk.

I wake and the room is flooded with pale-yellow light. ♦

I WILL SLAP YOU

BY COLIN JOST

You heard me.

Yeah, you. I will slap you.

You want to look at me like that?

I'll slap you so hard you're gonna wish I hadn't. I'll slap you so hard you're gonna be, like, "Don't."

And you? I'll slap you, too. I'll slap you right in the face.

Or the neck. Depends on how tall you are when you stand up.

And you? You think you're tough all of a sudden? I'll slap you so hard your *grandchildren* will feel it.

Like, out of nowhere, they'll just feel a weird slapping sensation. And they'll think, I wonder if this has something to do with our dumb-ass grandfather who's always running his dumb old mouth.

'Cause, trust me, I've slapped dudes



'Cause I'm five-three, baby. Five slaps in three seconds.

That's right. I'll slap you so fast you won't even know what hit you.

I mean, you'll have a pretty good idea. Because I told you in advance. But you'll also be distracted by—what's that?—a second slap.

This time with the *back* of my hand.

And, yeah, that is a Ring Pop. Berry Blast, bitch.

Excuse me?

Oh, is this funny to you? 'Cause I'll slap that smirk right off your face.

Then I'll slap the ugly off your face. And *onto* your body.

So now you're handsome but dumpy. Guess you'd better hit the gym, pretty boy.

half your size. And women twice your age.

I've slapped men twice your volume and one-tenth your density.

I've slapped goat-men half your species and twice your gender. So I will not hesitate to slap you upside the head.

Like, on top of your head.

Like, a little patronizing pat on the head.

And I'll say, "Who's a big boy?"

And you won't know *what the hell* to think.

And *you*? Reading your little "book." Man, I can't believe I haven't slapped you already!

I'll slap you so hard you'll be seeing

double. Like, twice as well. Because those glasses I slapped off your face were the wrong prescription.

Then I'm gonna slap you so hard I'm gonna miss entirely and hit that floral arrangement next to you. But then I'm gonna pretend like I was just giving it a high five.

So *you'll* still be the loser.

Oh, what's that?

I'm causing a scene? Well, guess what, I'll slap you and the horse you rode in on.

Oh, excuse me, Ma'am.

No, your face looks regular length and it's perfectly normal to give your son a piggyback ride.

But this dude?

Oh, I'll *definitely* slap you.

I'll slap you and that wheelchair you rode in . . . in. Then I'll slap you right out of that wheelchair.

'Cause you can walk now. Praise Him.

But you? You're not so lucky.

'Cause I'm gonna slap you silly. Then I'm gonna slap you slowly, and seriously.

Like a tearful caress.

Remember what we used to be?

And then I'm gonna slap you sideways. So, like . . . a karate chop.

I don't know, I didn't think that one through. Bottom line is, I'm gonna slap you so fast I'll be back on my recumbent bike before you can even say, "Why would you do that, Brad?"

I'll slap you so hard you'll wish you hadn't even *joined* this book club.

And, last but not least, we've got that big idiot Marvin. Hey, Marvin, you big hulking idiot, I'm gonna slap you so har—

Ow!

What the hell, Marvin? You slapped me! Ow, that really hurt.

Yeah, but I was joking!

'Cause it was funny! That's why everyone is basically laughing. You don't actually slap someone for real, you fat jerk—

No! I'm sorry!

Don't do it again.

Just . . . leave me alone.

(*Mumbling*) Or I'll slap you.

What? I didn't say anything, *Marvin*.

Damn it, I think all my teeth are broken. ♦

R U THERE?

A new counselling service harnesses the power of the text message.

BY ALICE GREGORY



In 2011, a young woman named Stephanie Shih was working in New York City at DoSomething.org, a nonprofit that helps young people start volunteer campaigns. Shih was responsible for sending out text messages to teen-agers across the country, alerting them to various altruistic opportunities and encouraging them to become involved in their local communities: running food drives, organizing support groups, getting their cafeterias to recycle more. Silly, prankish responses were not uncommon, but neither were messages of enthusiasm and thanks. Then, in August, after six months

on the job, Shih received a message that left her close to tears for the rest of the day. “He won’t stop raping me,” it said. “He told me not to tell anyone.” A few hours later, another message came: “R u there?” Shih wrote back, asking who was doing this. The next day, a response came in: “It’s my dad.”

DoSomething.org had no protocol for anything like this, so Shih texted back with the contact information for RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), the country’s largest anti-sexual-assault organization. But the texter indicated that she was too scared to make a phone call.

“This is the right thing to do,” Shih insisted. There was no reply. “Not knowing if she was safe or had gotten help or would ever get help consumed my thoughts,” Shih told me last fall. She printed out the text messages and handed them to her boss, Nancy Lublin, DoSomething.org’s C.E.O.

“I’ll never forget the day,” Lublin said. “It was like I’d been punched in the stomach.”

That week, Lublin and Shih started work on what two years later became Crisis Text Line, the first and only national, 24/7 crisis-intervention hotline to conduct its conversations (the majority of which are with teen-agers) exclusively by text message.

Depression is common among teens, and its consequences are volatile: suicide is the third leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of ten and twenty-four. In that same age group, the use of text messaging is near-universal. The average adolescent sends almost two thousand text messages a month. They contact their friends more by text than by phone or e-mail or instant-message or even face-to-face conversations. A.T.&T. offers parents a tutorial in deciphering acronyms used by children (PIR stands for “parent in room”). For teens, texting isn’t a novel form of communication; it’s the default.

People who spent their high-school years chatting with friends on landlines are often dismissive of texting, as if it might be a phase one outgrows, but the form is unparalleled in its ability to relay information concisely. The act of writing, even if the product consists of only a hundred and forty characters composed with one’s thumbs, forces a kind of real-time distillation of emotional chaos. A substantial body of research confirms the efficacy of writing as a therapeutic intervention, and although tapping out a text message isn’t the same as keeping a diary, it can act as a behavioral buffer, providing distance between a person and intense, immediate, and often impulsive feelings. Communication by text message is halting and asynchronous, which can be frustrating when you’re waiting for a reply but liberating when you don’t

Crisis Text Line has received five million texts, providing a unique corpus of data.

want to respond. The young people who contact Crisis Text Line might be doing so between classes, while waiting in line for the bus, or before soccer practice. In addition, more than ninety-eight per cent of text messages are opened; they are four times more likely to be read by the recipient than e-mails. If you're a parent, you know that, even if your son does not text you back about where he is, he has read your message. If you are a distressed teen or a counsellor, you know that what you say will be read.

A person can contact Crisis Text Line without even looking at her phone. The number—741741—traces a simple, muscle-memory-friendly path down the left column of the keypad. Anyone who texts in receives an automatic response welcoming her to the service. Another provides a link to the organization's privacy policy and explains that she can text "STOP" to end a conversation at any time. Meanwhile, the incoming message appears on the screen of Crisis Text Line's proprietary computer system. The interface looks remarkably like a Facebook feed—pale background, blue banner at the top, pop-up messages in the lower right corner—a design that is intended to feel familiar and frictionless. The system, which receives an average of fifteen thousand texts a day, highlights messages containing words that might indicate imminent danger, such as "suicide," "kill," and "hopeless."

Within five minutes, one of the counsellors on duty will write back. (Up to fifty people, most of them in their late twenties, are available at any given time, depending upon demand, and they can work wherever there's an Internet connection.) An introductory message from a counsellor includes a casual greeting and a question about why the texter is writing in. If the texter's first message is substantive ("My so-called boyfriend is drunk and won't stop yelling at me"), the counsellor echoes the language in order to elicit additional details ("I'm so sorry to hear that. Can you tell me a little more about what your so-called boyfriend is saying?"). If the incom-

ing message is vague ("Life sucks. I'm freaking out"), the reply will be more open-ended, while gently pressing for greater specificity ("So what's going on tonight?"). An average exchange takes place over a little more than an hour, longer if there is the risk of suicide.

Counsellors are trained to put texters at ease and not to jump too quickly into a problem-solving mode. Open-ended questions are good; "why" questions are bad. Also bad: making assumptions about the texter's gender or sexual orientation, sounding like a robot, using language that a young person might not know. Techniques that are encouraged include validation ("What a tough situation"); "tentafiers" ("Do you mind if I ask you..."); strength identification ("You're a great brother for being so worried about him"); and empathetic responses ("It sounds like you're feeling anxious because of all these rumors"). The implicit theory is that in a conversation people are naturally inclined to fill silences.

It is important to type carefully. In text messages sent to friends, typos can be an indication of intimacy. But a typo appearing on the cell-phone screen of a distressed teen-ager can undermine the sense of authority he's looking for. "You have to train yourself not to hit that return button automatically," a sixty-year-old counsellor from California told me. (Crisis Text Line counsellors are free to give a real or assumed first name to people who text in.) It is also regarded as a mistake to embrace teenage patois too enthusiastically. One volunteer told me that she tries not to use acronyms. "I sometimes worry that it would come across as too 'Oh, I got you!'" she said. Neutral language allows the texter to feel anonymous. These people have contacted a stranger for a reason. They aren't looking for friendship.

Often, the conversations are about minor-seeming problems—fights with friends, academic pressure from parents—and the bar for helpfulness is quite low. "A lot of times, when chatting with young people, it's clear that they just need someone to listen to them," one counsellor told me. "Some-

times it's obvious. They'll say, 'Thanks for listening. Nobody ever does that,' and at other times it's less explicit; they just want to get everything out, and they provide you with a very, very detailed account."

The etiquette encouraged for counsellors can be surprising. When an agitated friend texts me bad news (a breakup, a layoff, a sudden rent increase), my instinct is to find a positive response to the predicament ("But you didn't even like him!" "Now you can finally go freelance!" "MOVE!"). But this is precisely what one is not supposed to do when communicating with a teen-ager in crisis. Instead, counsellors are trained to deploy language that at first seems inflammatory: "You must be devastated" is a common refrain; so is "That sounds like torture." The idea is to validate texters' feelings and respond in a way that doesn't belittle them.

Thomas Joiner, a psychology professor at Florida State University and one of the country's leading suicide experts, pointed out another way in which conversational norms can be counterproductive. "From a clinical standpoint, one common misstep is tiptoeing around issues and treating them like taboos," he said. "It sends the implicit message that it's really not O.K. to talk about it, and if the counsellor doesn't feel comfortable talking about it why would the teen-ager?" It takes practice to tell someone who is suffering that he has a real problem, and that, though things may get better, it may not be anytime soon.

Each day, on average, Crisis Text Line instigates at least one active rescue of a texter who's thought to be in immediate danger of suicide. During active rescues, the counsellor asks questions as casually as possible—Are you alone? Do you have someone you trust whom you want us to contact? Is your door locked?—and feeds the answers to a trained supervisor, who, in turn, contacts the police. One counsellor, a twenty-eight-year-old former Division 1 basketball player who began volunteering last May, told me that the very first conversation he took was with a teen-ager who was contemplating jumping off a roof. The exchange lasted

for an hour, and, by the end of it, the teen was in the car with a parent, driving to the hospital.

In 1906, a woman staying at a Manhattan hotel asked the manager if she could speak to a minister. The manager tried calling Harry Marsh Warren, a minister at a Baptist church, but was unable to get through. The following morning, the woman was found unconscious beside a bottle of poison and was rushed to Bellevue. Warren visited her as she lay dying, and she told him, "I think maybe if I had talked to someone like you I wouldn't have done it." Soon after, Warren started the Save-A-Life League, the country's first suicide-prevention organization. He placed an ad in a local paper, encouraging anyone contemplating suicide to contact him. News spread quickly, as did the organization's reach. By the time Warren died, in 1940, there were branches across the United States, as well as in London and Paris, and the league was helping around a hundred people each week—providing counselling, free hospital beds, and legal services. It also raised summer-camp tuition for the children of suicides.

In the nineteen-forties, a Boston-based psychiatrist named Erich Lindemann attempted to make the field of crisis intervention more empirical. He conducted his research in the wake of the Cocoanut Grove disaster, of 1942, a fire at a Boston night club that killed nearly five hundred people. Lindemann interviewed dozens of survivors and published a paper based on his findings. He determined that people in crisis are open to help, and that appropriate and expedient treatment could avert the need for long-term psychotherapy, which was the leading method of mental-health treatment at the time.

A decade later, in London, Chad Varah, an Anglican priest, founded a suicide hotline in the crypt of his church: the Samaritans took its first call on November 2, 1953. The idea for the service had come to Varah

when he held a funeral for a fourteen-year-old girl who had killed herself on getting her first period, which she thought was symptomatic of a sexually transmitted disease. In 1958, the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center was founded, the first in America. It formulated a set of protocols that were adopted by other centers in the United States and abroad. Volunteers establish rapport, define the problems, and assess the risk of self-harm. They aim to reduce anxiety, discussing how callers have coped with similar problems in the past. Finally, they develop a specific plan of action.

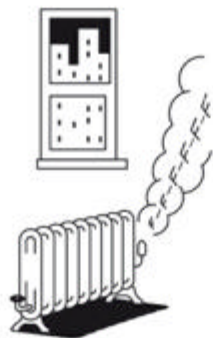
In 1963, President Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Act into law. Among other things, this legislation provided federal funding for community-based mental-health-care centers. Crisis-intervention hotlines soon proliferated, with separate lines for those experiencing suicidal thoughts, drug addiction, sexual abuse, eating disorders, and so on. This arrangement insured that callers would talk to someone who had a reasonable degree of expertise in what was troubling them. Crisis Text Line departs from this practice; there's just one number to text, whatever ails you. The medium makes it easy for volunteers to look up information, and the C.T.L. interface enables them to enlist the help of colleagues who have training in a particular area. Nancy Lublin often explains the system by saying, "People don't experience life in an issue-specific way."

Texting has other advantages. The fact that counsellors can work from home while eating Chinese takeout—and can even trade shifts with one another—makes it easier to attract volunteers. More important, from an adult perspective teen-agers can often seem willfully uncommunicative in speech but are forthcoming, even garrulous, when texting. "On the phone, you have to ask a few more questions, sort of explore a little bit more to find out what's really going on," Jen James, who works for C.T.L. in Michigan,

told me. "With the text line, they are pretty open. They just come out and tell you and want to talk about it." Research bears out this observation. According to Fred Conrad, a cognitive psychologist and the director of the Program in Survey Methodology at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, people are "more likely to disclose sensitive information via text messages than in voice interviews." To those who didn't grow up texting, this seems counterintuitive. Texts are a written record, after all, and what if the wrong person saw them? But, in practical terms, text messaging affords a level of privacy that the human voice makes impossible. If you're hiding from an abusive relative or you just don't want your classmates to know how overwhelmed you feel about applying to college, a text message, even one sent in public, is safer than a phone call. What's more, tears go undetected by the person you've reached out to, and you don't have to hear yourself say aloud your most shameful secrets.

It's difficult not to notice the mercuriness of the place in which these dismal matters are analyzed. DoSomething.org's headquarters, where the employees of Crisis Text Line also work, is situated just north of Union Square, in New York City. Stray balloons cling to the ceiling; there's an aquarium and a disco ball. Many of the staff members—eighty people, of whom only fourteen are over thirty—seem to spend much of the day without shoes. Under the bright lights and amid the cheerful buzz of people born after the Gulf War, one has a sense of observing kids collaborating on a group project at a school in a county with high property taxes.

DoSomething.org and Crisis Text Line are separate entities, but Nancy Lublin is the C.E.O. of both. She is forty-three, and likes to refer to herself as the C.O.P. (Chief Old Person). She speaks quickly, in a frank but friendly tone, and is unafraid to contort her face into goofy, sometimes even self-consciously grotesque expressions. Lublin brags on behalf of her employees, often in their presence, and has the air of a beloved



WHEREAS THE ANIMAL I CANNOT HELP BUT BE

The possum knows how to play himself,
is one of us. And the chameleon,
too, can fit right in, be other than it is.
I praise them both.

And as night rises up from grass
and comes down from the clouds,
bats at top speed merely glance
off of what they disturb.

I admire their graceful swoops,
and the brilliance of moles carving tunnels
under lawns, feeling their whiskery way
as they go. I even praise the cat,

its savage patience and quick paws.
And feel a camaraderie with the earthworm,
straightforward but slippery, both ends open,
getting under the feet of barefoot girls.

Unlike you and me, they have no choice.
They themselves are evidence
of what can be done conspicuously,
or under cover, without remorse.

Whereas the animal I cannot help but be,
having more than once been found out,
taken to task, envies still the silver fox
leaving a false trail, swerving this way, then that.

—Stephen Dunn

social-studies teacher who swears. When we first met, last October, she was wearing a cotton scarf printed with the face of Hello Kitty.

Lublin grew up in Hartford, Connecticut, a city that she disdainfully identifies as “the insurance capital of the world.” She attended Brown University and then Oxford, where she was a Marshall Scholar studying political theory—or, as she puts it, “a lot of dead white guys.” Upon returning to the States, Lublin enrolled in law school at N.Y.U. “My whole life people were, like, ‘Oh, you have a lot to say! You’re going to be a lawyer,’” she told me. But Lublin hated “everything from nine-point font in thick textbooks to the Socratic method to classmates who were really just fighting for the right to be on law review, which was looking up your profes-

sor’s footnotes for an article that was going to appear in a journal that maybe twelve people would read.” She dropped out after her fourth term.

While still at N.Y.U., Lublin recalled something that her father, a lawyer, once told her about his method of hiring new secretaries for the firm. Looking out his window, he would watch the women walk from their car to the front of the building and know before they reached the door whether he would hire them. “I remember being horrified by this story,” Lublin said. “‘You never even met her! How could you know that you’d hire her or not? Just based on what she looked like?’ And he’d say, ‘Yes, and that’s why you need to go comb your hair.’” Lublin chose to respond with a kind of benevolent pragmatism: in 1996, at the age of twenty-four, and with the help of three nuns

in Spanish Harlem, she founded Dress for Success, a nonprofit that provides interview suits to underprivileged women looking for jobs. The budget came from five thousand dollars that she had recently inherited from her great-grandfather and her occasional winnings at poker. The nuns found space in a church, rented for a few hundred dollars a month, but it flooded a week before the launch, and Lublin was forced to transplant all the garments to her apartment, a one-bedroom in Greenwich Village. Dress for Success’s inaugural client was Charline Brundidge, who had been granted clemency after a conviction for fatally shooting her physically abusive husband. As reported in the *Times*, “Gov. George E. Pataki gave Mrs. Brundidge a pardon. Dress for Success gave her a suit.”

Within two years, Dress for Success had expanded nationally and was operating out of thirty cities across the country. (There are now affiliates in sixteen countries worldwide, and the Home Shopping Network produces clothing for the organization.) But by 2002 Lublin was bored. She cashed in the bonds given to her for her bat mitzvah and left Dress for Success. She spent a year writing and fielding calls from headhunters intent on recruiting her for C.E.O. positions at large nonprofits. She had just turned thirty and knew that the companies approaching her saw her as a token young person. Then she got a call from the actor Andrew Shue, of “Melrose Place” fame, who had co-founded DoSomething.org ten years earlier. The organization, seriously in debt, had just lost its headquarters and almost all its staff. Lublin thought this would be the perfect place to start up again from scratch. This was 2003, a year before Facebook was launched, and Lublin knew that if the organization was to have a future it would have to live online. She closed five of DoSomething’s offices; reconfigured its board of directors; and began polling its teen-age members about their habits, preferences, and passions. The organization now operates on a healthy budget of more than nine million dollars, attracts corporate sponsorship from companies

like JetBlue and H&M, and hosts benefits that raise up to a million dollars.

In the fall of 2011, Lublin began raising funds for Crisis Text Line. To date, she has raised about five million dollars. Promotion is solely by word of mouth, and within four months the organization was receiving texts from all two hundred and ninety-five area codes in the United States. Lublin, who is friends with many Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and sees herself as an iconoclast, has built Crisis Text Line more along the lines of a tech company than a nonprofit. She told me, “We think of ourselves a lot more like Airbnb or Uber or Lyft.”

Like a tech company, C.T.L. analyzes feedback from users, performs A/B testing, and is quick to make changes on the basis of what it finds. Although other data-driven philanthropic missions exist—Kiva, the microfinance site, and the public-school donation service Donors Choose are among the more well known—nonprofits have generally been reluctant to embrace methods of quantification that big corporations increasingly take for granted. But at C.T.L. the chief data scientist, Bob Filbin, was Lublin’s second hire. He co-wrote the data algorithms for C.T.L.’s system after travelling to crisis centers across

the country and interviewing hundreds of volunteers about how their work could be made more effective. The communication techniques employed by C.T.L. counsellors are largely modelled on standard crisis-counseling practices, but C.T.L. has made modifications based on its data. It turns out that, for instance, statements couched in the first person (“I’m worried about how upset you seem”) are associated with positive responses.

The organization’s quantified approach, based on five million texts, has already produced a unique collection of mental-health data. C.T.L. has found that depression peaks at 8 P.M., anxiety at 11 P.M., self-harm at 4 A.M., and substance abuse at 5 A.M. The organization is working on predictive analysis, which would allow counsellors to determine with a high degree of accuracy whether a texter from a particular area, writing in at a particular time, using particular words, was, say, high on methamphetamine or the victim of sex trafficking. A texter who uses the word “Mormon” tends to be reaching out about L.G.B.T.Q. issues.

Out of consideration for texters’ anonymity, Crisis Text Line displays its findings only by state. (Arkansas ranks highest for eating disorders, Vermont for depression; suicidal thoughts are most common in Montana and least

common in New Hampshire.) But eventually there will be enough data to allow the organization to confidently reveal Zip codes and area codes without the risk of making any single texter identifiable. Such a wealth of data is new in the field of mental health. Isaac Kohane, a pediatrician who also has a Ph.D. in computer science and is the co-director of the Center for Biomedical Informatics at Harvard Medical School, told me, “You cannot have accountable care—financially or morally accountable care—if you cannot count, and until recently we literally could not count with any degree of acceptable accuracy.” He added, “It’s been mind-boggling, to those of us who knew what was available, that Amazon and Netflix were creating a far more customized, data-driven, evidence-based experience for their consumers than medicine has.”

Lublin hopes that the data will eventually be useful to school districts and police departments. “The corpus of data has the volume, velocity, and variety to really draw meaningful conclusions,” she told me. Lublin also mentioned that many people have told her that she is “crazy” for not wanting to sell the data that have been collected. A hedge-fund manager said that he would happily pay for a subscription that allowed him access to crisis trends. “I was basically, like, You’re a jerk,” she recalled thinking.



“Forget it, Jake. It’s Funkytown.”

One Sunday evening in early December, I embarked on a training course as a Crisis Text Line counsellor. I was out of the country, but, as befits an organization in which the person who saves your life may be thousands of miles away, training takes place online. You learn by watching videos, reading PDFs, taking online quizzes, role-playing with fellow-counsellors, and observing conversations live. Volunteers, who must be older than eighteen, have to pass a preliminary interview and a background check. The course runs for thirty-four hours, over a period of seven weeks, and concludes with a final one-on-one video interview lasting twenty-five minutes. New counsellors commit to one four-hour weekend or evening shift per week for a year.

At the start of the first session, the

faces of twenty-one participants, on Webcam, appeared along the top of my screen, some small and framed by the rooms around them, others so close that I could see their pores. We smiled and waved at one another; we all looked to be in our twenties or thirties. Our supervisor, who was wearing a pink plush hat, introduced herself and, in a crackling voice, let us know that we were welcome to wear pajamas next time. Like the sessions that followed in the coming weeks, this one was ninety minutes long but felt more like thirty. The training combines two pleasures largely lacking in adult life: structured incremental learning and make-believe. In an instant-message box, we practiced replying to various imaginary texts. The recommended formula for replies is tentafier + feeling adjective + source of feeling ("It sounds like you're feeling ashamed because your friend didn't invite you to her party"). We also practiced paraphrased reflections ("You must be really upset with your friend"). We learned to ask open-ended questions and to actively identify a texter's strengths: pointing out his bravery in reaching out, complimenting his self-awareness. Then we were paired up in order to practice these skills in a role-play, one of us pretending to be an upset teen-ager and the other acting as a C.T.L. volunteer. Afterward, we annotated the transcript with "pluses" and "wishes," the organization's preferred language for "good" and "bad." Intermittently, the supervisor's cursor appeared in the document to offer advice.

The thing I found most difficult was employing Crisis Text Line's teachings while still coming across like myself. The maxim "Don't sound like a robot" is often repeated, and eventually it was possible to achieve this effect by imagining my words being read by a teen-ager. Using as many contractions as possible came to seem surprisingly important, because formality gets in the way of affirmation. It was hard to fend off vague and echoey therapist-speak, and I wasted a lot of time trying to rephrase the question "And how does that make you feel?" before realizing

that I didn't have to. There is something humbling about Crisis Text Line, and, indeed, about help lines in general: a person in pain will say what she wants to say, and it probably doesn't matter much who does the asking.

The weekly practice sessions are the core of the training. Volunteers also participate in two Observation Shifts (each three hours long), in which they have the opportunity to see actual conversations occur between texters and a counsellor. Crisis Text Line goes to great lengths to insure that texters' identity remains secret, and trainees sign a stringent agreement to protect confidentiality. (I agreed not to divulge personal details.) During my first shift, I witnessed a halting conversation between a counsellor and a young girl with body dysmorphia. The conversation lasted for an hour and a half. The counsellor provided links to resources for people struggling with eating disorders, and the girl eventually agreed to distract herself with a bath and a movie. Simultaneously, that counsellor was texting with a girl who wanted to cut herself and was having suicidal thoughts, and with a third texter whose grades were plummeting because of depression. This last texter was much less engaged in the process than the others were. "This isn't making me feel much better," he or she wrote. Soon after, the communication fizzled out entirely.

A week later, I shadowed another counsellor. Her first conversation was with a girl who was fighting with her cousin and struggling against the urge to hurt herself. The next was with a college-aged young man who was confused about the romantic feelings he harbored for his ex-boyfriend, who had sexually assaulted him. The counsellor's last conversation of the night was with the daughter of an abusive father. She wrote that she avoided him by spending lots of time locked in her bedroom. The counsellor reassured her and asked about her plans for the rest of the evening. She said that she was going shopping with her family, and that afterward she'd be alone. She typed, "That's the part I'm scared for." ♦

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THE TRIP TREATMENT

Research into psychedelics, shut down for decades, is now yielding exciting results.

BY MICHAEL POLLAN

On an April Monday in 2010, Patrick Mettes, a fifty-four-year-old television news director being treated for a cancer of the bile ducts, read an article on the front page of the *Times* that would change his death. His diagnosis had come three years earlier, shortly after his wife, Lisa, noticed that the whites of his eyes had turned yellow. By 2010, the cancer had spread to Patrick's lungs and he was buckling under the weight of a debilitating chemotherapy regimen and the growing fear that he might not survive. The article, headlined "HALLUCINOGENS HAVE DOCTORS TUNING IN AGAIN," mentioned clinical trials at several universities, including N.Y.U., in which psilocybin—the active ingredient in so-called magic mushrooms—was being administered to cancer patients in an effort to relieve their anxiety and "existential distress." One of the researchers was quoted as saying that, under the influence of the hallucinogen, "individuals transcend their primary identification with their bodies and experience ego-free states . . . and return with a new perspective and profound acceptance." Patrick had never taken a psychedelic drug, but he immediately wanted to volunteer. Lisa was against the idea. "I didn't want there to be an easy way out," she recently told me. "I wanted him to fight."

Patrick made the call anyway and, after filling out some forms and answering a long list of questions, was accepted into the trial. Since hallucinogens can sometimes bring to the surface latent psychological problems, researchers try to weed out volunteers at high risk by asking questions about drug use and whether there is a family history of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. After the screening, Mettes was assigned to a therapist named Anthony Bossis, a bearded, bearish psychologist in his mid-fifties, with a specialty in palliative care. Bossis is a co-principal investigator for the N.Y.U. trial.

After four meetings with Bossis,

Mettes was scheduled for two dosings—one of them an "active" placebo (in this case, a high dose of niacin, which can produce a tingling sensation), and the other a pill containing the psilocybin. Both sessions, Mettes was told, would take place in a room decorated to look more like a living room than like a medical office, with a comfortable couch, landscape paintings on the wall, and, on the shelves, books of art and mythology, along with various aboriginal and spiritual tchotchkes, including a Buddha and a glazed ceramic mushroom. During each session, which would last the better part of a day, Mettes would lie on the couch wearing an eye mask and listening through headphones to a carefully curated playlist—Brian Eno, Philip Glass, Pat Metheny, Ravi Shankar. Bossis and a second therapist would be there throughout, saying little but being available to help should he run into any trouble.

I met Bossis last year in the N.Y.U. treatment room, along with his colleague Stephen Ross, an associate professor of psychiatry at N.Y.U.'s medical school, who directs the ongoing psilocybin trials. Ross, who is in his forties, was dressed in a suit and could pass for a banker. He is also the director of the substance-abuse division at Bellevue, and he told me that he had known little about psychedelics—drugs that produce radical changes in consciousness, including hallucinations—until a colleague happened to mention that, in the nineteen-sixties, LSD had been used successfully to treat alcoholics. Ross did some research and was astounded at what he found.

"I felt a little like an archeologist unearthing a completely buried body of knowledge," he said. Beginning in the nineteen-fifties, psychedelics had been used to treat a wide variety of conditions, including alcoholism and end-of-life anxiety. The American Psychiatric Association held meetings centered on LSD. "Some of the best minds in psychiatry

had seriously studied these compounds in therapeutic models, with government funding," Ross said.

Between 1953 and 1973, the federal government spent four million dollars to fund a hundred and sixteen studies of LSD, involving more than seventeen hundred subjects. (These figures don't include classified research.) Through the mid-nineteen-sixties, psilocybin and LSD were legal and remarkably easy to obtain. Sandoz, the Swiss chemical company where, in 1938, Albert Hofmann first synthesized LSD, gave away large quantities of Delysid—LSD—to any researcher who requested it, in the hope that someone would discover a marketable application. Psychedelics were tested on alcoholics, people struggling with obsessive-compulsive disorder, depressives, autistic children, schizophrenics, terminal cancer patients, and convicts, as well as on perfectly healthy artists and scientists (to study creativity) and divinity students (to study spirituality). The results reported were frequently positive. But many of the studies were, by modern standards, poorly designed and seldom well controlled, if at all. When there were controls, it was difficult to blind the researchers—that is, hide from them which volunteers had taken the actual drug. (This remains a problem.)

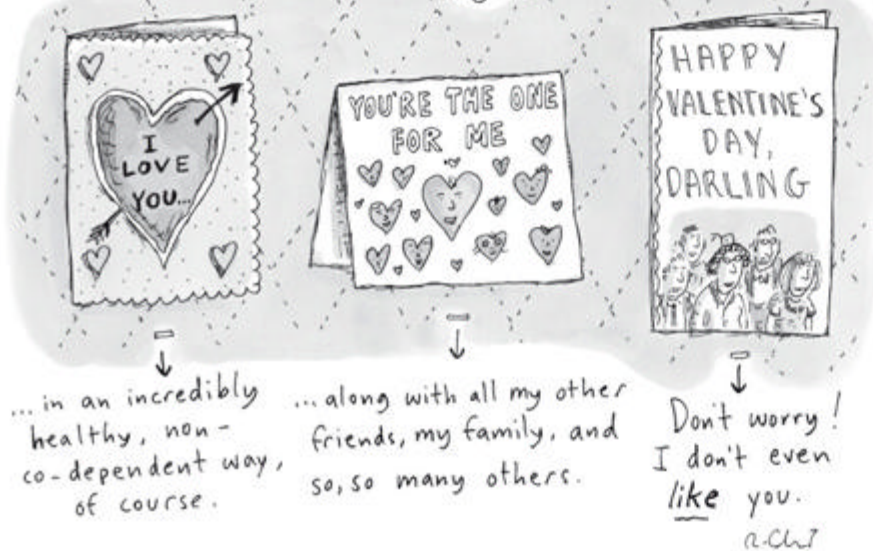
By the mid-nineteen-sixties, LSD had escaped from the laboratory and swept through the counterculture. In 1970, Richard Nixon signed the Controlled Substances Act and put most psychedelics on Schedule 1, prohibiting their use for any purpose. Research soon came to a halt, and what had been learned was all but erased from the field of psychiatry. "By the time I got to medical school, no one even talked about it," Ross said.

The clinical trials at N.Y.U.—a second one, using psilocybin to treat alcohol addiction, is now getting under way—are part of a renaissance of psychedelic



Psilocybin may be useful in treating anxiety, addiction, and depression, and in studying the neurobiology of mystical experience.

Valentines for Adults



research taking place at several universities in the United States, including Johns Hopkins, the Harbor-U.C.L.A. Medical Center, and the University of New Mexico, as well as at Imperial College, in London, and the University of Zurich. As the drug war subsides, scientists are eager to reconsider the therapeutic potential of these drugs, beginning with psilocybin. (Last month *The Lancet*, the United Kingdom's most prominent medical journal, published a guest editorial in support of such research.) The effects of psilocybin resemble those of LSD, but, as one researcher explained, "it carries none of the political and cultural baggage of those three letters." LSD is also stronger and longer-lasting in its effects, and is considered more likely to produce adverse reactions. Researchers are using or planning to use psilocybin not only to treat anxiety, addiction (to smoking and alcohol), and depression but also to study the neurobiology of mystical experience, which the drug, at high doses, can reliably occasion. Forty years after the Nixon Administration effectively shut down most psychedelic research, the government is gingerly allowing a small number of scientists to resume working with these powerful and still somewhat mysterious molecules.

As I chatted with Tony Bossis and Stephen Ross in the treatment room at N.Y.U., their excitement about the re-

sults was evident. According to Ross, cancer patients receiving just a single dose of psilocybin experienced immediate and dramatic reductions in anxiety and depression, improvements that were sustained for at least six months. The data are still being analyzed and have not yet been submitted to a journal for peer review, but the researchers expect to publish later this year.

"I thought the first ten or twenty people were plants—that they must be faking it," Ross told me. "They were saying things like 'I understand love is the most powerful force on the planet,' or 'I had an encounter with my cancer, this black cloud of smoke.' People who had been palpably scared of death—they lost their fear. The fact that a drug given once can have such an effect for so long is an unprecedented finding. We have never had anything like it in the psychiatric field."

I was surprised to hear such unguarded enthusiasm from a scientist, and a substance-abuse specialist, about a street drug that, since 1970, has been classified by the government as having no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. But the support for renewed research on psychedelics is widespread among medical experts. "I'm personally biased in favor of these type of studies," Thomas R. Insel, the director of the National Institute of Mental Health (N.I.M.H.) and a neuroscientist, told me. "If it proves useful

to people who are really suffering, we should look at it. Just because it is a psychedelic doesn't disqualify it in our eyes." Nora Volkow, the director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), emphasized that "it is important to remind people that experimenting with drugs of abuse outside a research setting can produce serious harms."

Many researchers I spoke with described their findings with excitement, some using words like "mind-blowing." Bossis said, "People don't realize how few tools we have in psychiatry to address existential distress. Xanax isn't the answer. So how can we not explore this, if it can recalibrate how we die?"

Herbert D. Kleber, a psychiatrist and the director of the substance-abuse division at the Columbia University-N.Y. State Psychiatric Institute, who is one of the nation's leading experts on drug abuse, struck a cautionary note. "The whole area of research is fascinating," he said. "But it's important to remember that the sample sizes are small." He also stressed the risk of adverse effects and the importance of "having guides in the room, since you can have a good experience or a frightful one." But he added, referring to the N.Y.U. and Johns Hopkins research, "These studies are being carried out by very well trained and dedicated therapists who know what they're doing. The question is, is it ready for prime time?"

The idea of giving a psychedelic drug to the dying was conceived by a novelist: Aldous Huxley. In 1953, Humphry Osmond, an English psychiatrist, introduced Huxley to mescaline, an experience he chronicled in "The Doors of Perception," in 1954. (Osmond coined the word "psychedelic," which means "mind-manifesting," in a 1957 letter to Huxley.) Huxley proposed a research project involving the "administration of LSD to terminal cancer cases, in the hope that it would make dying a more spiritual, less strictly physiological process." Huxley had his wife inject him with the drug on his deathbed; he died at sixty-nine, of laryngeal cancer, on November 22, 1963.

Psilocybin mushrooms first came to the attention of Western medicine (and popular culture) in a fifteen-page 1957 *Life* article by an amateur mycologist—and a vice-president of J. P. Morgan in

New York—named R. Gordon Wasson. In 1955, after years spent chasing down reports of the clandestine use of magic mushrooms among indigenous Mexicans, Wasson was introduced to them by María Sabina, a *curandera*—a healer, or shaman—in southern Mexico. Wasson’s awed first-person account of his psychedelic journey during a nocturnal mushroom ceremony inspired several scientists, including Timothy Leary, a well-regarded psychologist doing personality research at Harvard, to take up the study of psilocybin. After trying magic mushrooms in Cuernavaca, in 1960, Leary conceived the Harvard Psilocybin Project, to study the therapeutic potential of hallucinogens. His involvement with LSD came a few years later.

In the wake of Wasson’s research, Albert Hofmann experimented with magic mushrooms in 1957. “Thirty minutes after my taking the mushrooms, the exterior world began to undergo a strange transformation,” he wrote. “Everything assumed a Mexican character.” Hofmann proceeded to identify, isolate, and then synthesize the active ingredient, psilocybin, the compound being used in the current research.

Perhaps the most influential and rigorous of these early studies was the Good Friday experiment, conducted in 1962 by Walter Pahnke, a psychiatrist and minister working on a Ph.D. dissertation under Leary at Harvard. In a double-blind experiment, twenty divinity students received a capsule of white powder right before a Good Friday service at Marsh Chapel, on the Boston University campus; ten contained psilocybin, ten an active placebo (nicotinic acid). Eight of the ten students receiving psilocybin reported a mystical experience, while only one in the control group experienced a feeling of “sacredness” and a “sense of peace.” (Telling the subjects apart was not difficult, rendering the double-blind a somewhat hollow conceit: those on the placebo sat sedately in their pews while the others lay down or wandered around the chapel, muttering things like “God is everywhere” and “Oh, the glory!”) Pahnke concluded that the experiences of eight who received the psilocybin were “indistinguishable from, if not identical with,” the classic mystical experiences reported in the lit-

erature by William James, Walter Stace, and others.

In 1991, Rick Doblin, the director of the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), published a follow-up study, in which he tracked down all but one of the divinity students who received psilocybin at Marsh Chapel and interviewed seven of them. They all reported that the experience had shaped their lives and work in profound and enduring ways. But Doblin found flaws in Pahnke’s published account: he had failed to mention that several subjects struggled with acute anxiety during their experience. One had to be restrained and given Thorazine, a powerful anti-psychotic, after he ran from the chapel and headed down Commonwealth Avenue, convinced that he had been chosen to announce that the Messiah had arrived.

The first wave of research into psychedelics was doomed by an excessive exuberance about their potential. For people working with these remarkable molecules, it was difficult not to conclude that they were suddenly in possession of news with the power to change the world—a psychedelic gospel. They found it hard to justify confining these drugs to the laboratory or using them only for the benefit of the sick. It didn’t take long for once respectable scientists such as Leary to grow impatient with the rigmarole of objective science. He came to see science as just another societal “game,” a conventional box it was time to blow up—along with all the others.

Was the suppression of psychedelic research inevitable? Stanislav Grof, a Czech-born psychiatrist who used LSD extensively in his practice in the nineteen-sixties, believes that psychedelics “loosed the Dionysian element” on America, posing a threat to the country’s Puritan values that was bound to be repulsed. (He thinks the same thing could happen again.) Roland Griffiths, a psychopharmacologist at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, points out that ours is not the first culture to feel threatened by psychedelics: the reason Gordon Wasson had to rediscover magic mushrooms in Mexico was that the Spanish had suppressed them

so thoroughly, deeming them dangerous instruments of paganism.

“There is such a sense of authority that comes out of the primary mystical experience that it can be threatening to existing hierarchical structures,” Griffiths told me when we met in his office last spring. “We ended up demonizing these compounds. Can you think of another area of science regarded as so dangerous and taboo that all research gets shut down for decades? It’s unprecedented in modern science.”

Early in 2006, Tony Bossis, Stephen Ross, and Jeffrey Guss, a psychiatrist and N.Y.U. colleague, began meeting after work on Friday afternoons to read up on and discuss the scientific literature on psychedelics. They called themselves the P.R.G., or Psychedelic Reading Group, but within a few months the “R” in P.R.G. had come to stand for “Research.” They had decided to try to start an experimental trial at N.Y.U., using psilocybin alongside therapy to treat anxiety in cancer patients. The obstacles to such a trial were formidable: Would the F.D.A. and the D.E.A. grant permission to use the drug? Would N.Y.U.’s Institutional Review Board, charged with protecting experimental subjects, allow them to administer a psychedelic to cancer patients? Then, in July of 2006, the journal *Psychopharmacology* published a landmark article by Roland Griffiths, et al., titled “Psilocybin Can Occasion Mystical-Type Experiences Having Substantial and Sustained Personal Meaning and Spiritual Significance.”

“We all rushed in with Roland’s article,” Bossis recalls. “It solidified our confidence that we could do this work. Johns Hopkins had shown it could be done safely.” The article also gave Ross the ammunition he needed to persuade a skeptical I.R.B. “The fact that psychedelic research was being done at Hopkins—considered the premier medical center in the country—made it easier to get it approved here. It was an amazing study, with such an elegant design. And it opened up the field.” (Even so, psychedelic research remains tightly regulated and closely scrutinized. The N.Y.U. trial could not begin until Ross obtained



approvals first from the F.D.A., then from N.Y.U.'s Oncology Review Board, and then from the I.R.B., the Bellevue Research Review Committee, the Bluestone Center for Clinical Research, the Clinical and Translational Science Institute, and, finally, the Drug Enforcement Administration, which must grant the license to use a Schedule 1 substance.)

Griffiths's double-blind study reprised the work done by Pahnke in the nineteen-sixties, but with considerably more scientific rigor. Thirty-six volunteers, none of whom had ever taken a hallucinogen, received a pill containing either psilocybin or an active placebo (methylphenidate, or Ritalin); in a subsequent session the pills were reversed. "When administered under supportive conditions," the paper concluded, "psilocybin occasioned experiences similar to spontaneously occurring mystical experiences." Participants ranked these experiences as among the most meaningful in their lives, comparable to the birth of a child or the death of a parent. Two-thirds of the participants rated the psilocybin session among the top five most spiritually significant experiences of their lives; a third ranked it at the top. Fourteen months later, these ratings had slipped only slightly.

Furthermore, the "completeness" of the mystical experience closely tracked the improvements reported in personal well-being, life satisfaction, and "positive behavior change" measured two months and then fourteen months after the session. (The researchers relied on both self-assessments and the assessments of co-workers, friends, and family.) The authors determined the completeness of a mystical experience using two questionnaires, including the Pahnke-Richards Mystical Experience Questionnaire, which is based in part on William James's writing in "The Varieties of Religious Experience." The questionnaire measures feelings of unity, sacredness, ineffability, peace and joy, as well as the impression of having transcended space and time and the "noetic sense" that the experience has disclosed some objective truth about reality. A "complete" mystical experience is one that exhibits all six characteristics. Griffiths believes that the long-term effectiveness of the drug is due to its ability to occasion such a transformative experience, but not by changing the brain's long-term chemistry, as a conven-

tional psychiatric drug like Prozac does.

A follow-up study by Katherine MacLean, a psychologist in Griffiths's lab, found that the psilocybin experience also had a positive and lasting effect on the personality of most participants. This is a striking result, since the conventional wisdom in psychology holds that personality is usually fixed by age thirty and thereafter is unlikely to substantially change. But more than a year after their psilocybin sessions volunteers who had had the most complete mystical experiences showed significant increases in their "openness," one of the five domains that psychologists look at in assessing personality traits. (The others are conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism.) Openness, which encompasses aesthetic appreciation, imagination, and tolerance of others' viewpoints, is a good predictor of creativity.

"I don't want to use the word 'mind-blowing,'" Griffiths told me, "but, as a scientific phenomenon, if you can create conditions in which seventy per cent of people will say they have had one of the five most meaningful experiences of their lives? To a scientist, that's just incredible."

The revival of psychedelic research today owes much to the respectability of its new advocates. At sixty-eight, Roland Griffiths, who was trained as a behaviorist and holds senior appointments in psychiatry and neuroscience at Hopkins, is one of the nation's leading drug-addiction researchers. More than six feet tall, he is rail-thin and stands bolt upright; the only undisciplined thing about him is a thatch of white hair so dense that it appears to have held his comb to a draw. His long, productive relationship with NIDA has resulted in some three hundred and fifty papers, with titles such as "Reduction of Heroin Self-Administration in Baboons by Manipulation of Behavioral and Pharmacological Conditions." Tom Insel, the director of the N.I.M.H., described Griffiths as "a very careful, thoughtful scientist" with "a reputation for meticulous data analysis. So it's fascinating that he's now involved in an area that other people might view as pushing the edge."

Griffiths's career took an unexpected turn in the nineteen-nineties after two serendipitous introductions. The first

came when a friend introduced him to Siddha Yoga, in 1994. He told me that meditation acquainted him with "something way, way beyond a material world view that I can't really talk to my colleagues about, because it involves metaphors or assumptions that I'm really uncomfortable with as a scientist." He began entertaining "fanciful thoughts" of quitting science and going to India.

In 1996, an old friend and colleague named Charles R. (Bob) Schuster, recently retired as the head of NIDA, suggested that Griffiths talk to Robert Jesse, a young man he'd recently met at Esalen, the retreat center in Big Sur, California. Jesse was neither a medical professional nor a scientist; he was a computer guy, a vice-president at Oracle, who had made it his mission to revive the science of psychedelics, as a tool not so much of medicine as of spirituality. He had organized a gathering of researchers and religious figures to discuss the spiritual and therapeutic potential of psychedelic drugs and how they might be rehabilitated.

When the history of second-wave psychedelic research is written, Bob Jesse will be remembered as one of two scientific outsiders who worked for years, mostly behind the scenes, to get it off the ground. (The other is Rick Doblin, the founder of MAPS.) While on leave from Oracle, Jesse established a nonprofit called the Council on Spiritual Practices, with the aim of "making direct experience of the sacred more available to more people." (He prefers the term "entheogen," or "God-facilitating," to "psychedelic.") In 1996, the C.S.P. organized the historic gathering at Esalen. Many of the fifteen in attendance were "psychedelic elders," researchers such as James Fadiman and Willis Harman, both of whom had done early psychedelic research while at Stanford, and religious figures like Huston Smith, the scholar of comparative religion. But Jesse wisely decided to invite an outsider as well: Bob Schuster, a drug-abuse expert who had served in two Republican Administrations. By the end of the meeting, the Esalen group had decided on a plan: "to get aboveboard, unassailable research done, at an institution with investigators beyond reproach," and, ideally, "do this without any promise of clinical treatment." Jesse was ultimately less interested in people's mental

disorders than in their spiritual well-being—in using entheogens for what he calls “the betterment of well people.”

Shortly after the Esalen meeting, Bob Schuster (who died in 2011) phoned Jesse to tell him about his old friend Roland Griffiths, whom he described as “the investigator beyond reproach” Jesse was looking for. Jesse flew to Baltimore to meet Griffiths, inaugurating a series of conversations and meetings about meditation and spirituality that eventually drew Griffiths into psychedelic research and would culminate, a few years later, in the 2006 paper in *Psychopharmacology*.

The significance of the 2006 paper went far beyond its findings. The journal invited several prominent drug researchers and neuroscientists to comment on the study, and all of them treated it as a convincing case for further research. Herbert Kleber, of Columbia, applauded the paper and acknowledged that “major therapeutic possibilities” could result from further psychedelic research studies, some of which “merit N.I.H. support.” Solomon Snyder, the Hopkins neuroscientist who, in the nineteen-seventies, discovered the brain’s opioid receptors, summarized what Griffiths had achieved for the field: “The ability of these researchers to conduct a double-blind, well-controlled study tells us that clinical research with psychedelic drugs need not be so risky as to be off-limits to most investigators.”

Roland Griffiths and Bob Jesse had opened a door that had been tightly shut for more than three decades. Charles Grob, at U.C.L.A., was the first to step through it, winning F.D.A. approval for a Phase I pilot study to assess the safety, dosing, and efficacy of psilocybin in the treatment of anxiety in cancer patients. Next came the Phase II trials, just concluded at both Hopkins and N.Y.U., involving higher doses and larger groups (twenty-nine at N.Y.U.; fifty-six at Hopkins)—including Patrick Mettes and about a dozen other cancer patients in New York and Baltimore whom I recently interviewed.

Since 2006, Griffiths’s lab has conducted a pilot study on the potential of psilocybin to treat smoking addiction, the results of which were published last November in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology*. The sample is tiny—fifteen smokers—but the success rate is striking. Twelve subjects, all of whom had



“We’re upgrading our business to something worse.”

tried to quit multiple times, using various methods, were verified as abstinent six months after treatment, a success rate of eighty per cent. (Currently, the leading cessation treatment is nicotine-replacement therapy; a recent review article in the *BMJ*—formerly the *British Medical Journal*—reported that the treatment helped smokers remain abstinent for six months in less than seven per cent of cases.) In the Hopkins study, subjects underwent two or three psilocybin sessions and a course of cognitive-behavioral therapy to help them deal with cravings. The psychedelic experience seems to allow many subjects to reframe, and then break, a lifelong habit. “Smoking seemed irrelevant, so I stopped,” one subject told me. The volunteers who reported a more complete mystical experience had greater success in breaking the habit. A larger, Phase II trial comparing psilocybin to nicotine replacement (both in conjunction with cognitive behavioral therapy) is getting under way at Hopkins.

“We desperately need a new treatment approach for addiction,” Herbert Kleber told me. “Done in the right hands—and I stress that, because the whole psychedelic area attracts people who often think that they know the truth before doing the science—this could be a very useful one.”

Thus far, criticism of psychedelic research has been limited. Last summer, Florian Holsboer, the director of the Max Planck Institute of Psychiatry, in Munich, told *Science*, “You can’t give patients some substance just because it has an antidepressant effect on top of many other effects. That’s too dangerous.” Nora Volkow, of NIDA, wrote me in an e-mail that “the main concern we have at NIDA in relation to this work is that the public will walk away with the message that psilocybin is a safe drug to use. In fact, its adverse effects are well known, although not completely predictable.” She added, “Progress has been made in decreasing use of hallucinogens, particularly in young people. We would not want to see that trend altered.”

The recreational use of psychedelics is famously associated with instances of psychosis, flashback, and suicide. But these adverse effects have not surfaced in the trials of drugs at N.Y.U. and Johns Hopkins. After nearly five hundred administrations of psilocybin, the researchers have reported no serious negative effects. This is perhaps less surprising than it sounds, since volunteers are self-selected, carefully screened and prepared for the experience, and are then guided through it by therapists well trained to manage the episodes of fear and anxiety

that many volunteers do report. Apart from the molecules involved, a psychedelic therapy session and a recreational psychedelic experience have very little in common.

The lab at Hopkins is currently conducting a study of particular interest to Griffiths: examining the effect of psilocybin on long-term meditators. The study plans to use fMRI—functional magnetic-resonance imaging—to study the brains of forty meditators before, during, and after they have taken psilocybin, to measure changes in brain activity and connectivity and to see what these “trained contemplatives can tell us about the experience.” Griffiths’s lab is also launching a study in collaboration with N.Y.U. that will give the drug to religious professionals in a number of faiths to see how the experience might contribute to their work. “I feel like a kid in a candy shop,” Griffiths told me. “There are so many directions to take this research. It’s a Rip Van Winkle effect—after three decades of no research, we’re rubbing the sleep from our eyes.”

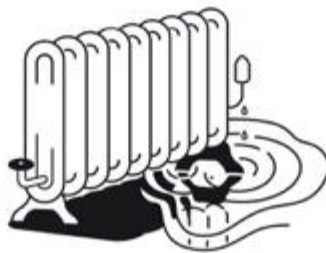
Ineffability” is a hallmark of the mystical experience. Many struggle to describe the bizarre events going on in their minds during a guided psychedelic journey without sounding like either a New Age guru or a lunatic. The available vocabulary isn’t always up to the task of recounting an experience that seemingly can take someone out of body, across vast stretches of time and space, and include face-to-face encounters with divinities and demons and previews of their own death.

Volunteers in the N.Y.U. psilocybin trial were required to write a narrative of their experience soon after the treatment, and Patrick Mettes, having worked in journalism, took the assignment seriously. His wife, Lisa, said that, after his Friday session, he worked all weekend to make sense of the experience and write it down.

When Mettes arrived at the treatment room, at First Avenue and Twenty-fifth Street, Tony Bossis and Krystallia Kalliontzi, his guides, greeted him, reviewed the day’s plan, and, at 9 A.M., presented him with a small chalice containing the pill. None of them knew whether it contained psilocybin or the placebo. Asked to state his intention, Mettes said that

he wanted to learn to cope better with the anxiety and the fear that he felt about his cancer. As the researchers had suggested, he’d brought a few photographs along—of Lisa and him on their wedding day, and of their dog, Arlo—and placed them around the room.

At nine-thirty, Mettes lay down on the couch, put on the headphones and eye mask, and fell silent. In his account, he likened the start of the journey to the launch of a space shuttle, “a physically vi-



olent and rather clunky liftoff which eventually gave way to the blissful serenity of weightlessness.”

Several of the volunteers I interviewed reported feeling intense fear and anxiety before giving themselves up to the experience, as the guides encourage them to do. The guides work from a set of “flight instructions” prepared by Bill Richards, a Baltimore psychologist who worked with Stanislav Grof during the nineteen-seventies and now trains a new generation of psychedelic therapists. The document is a summary of the experience accumulated from managing thousands of psychedelic sessions—and countless bad trips—during the nineteen-sixties, whether these took place in therapeutic settings or in the bad-trip tent at Woodstock.

The “same force that takes you deep within will, of its own impetus, return you safely to the everyday world,” the manual offers at one point. Guides are instructed to remind subjects that they’ll never be left alone and not to worry about their bodies while journeying, since the guides will keep an eye on them. If you feel like you’re “dying, melting, dissolving, exploding, going crazy etc.—go ahead,” embrace it: “Climb staircases, open doors, explore paths, fly over landscapes.” And if you confront anything frightening, “look the monster in the eye and move towards it. . . . Dig in your heels; ask, ‘What are you doing in my mind?’ Or, ‘What can I

learn from you?’ Look for the darkest corner in the basement, and shine your light there.” This training may help explain why the darker experiences that sometimes accompany the recreational use of psychedelics have not surfaced in the N.Y.U. and Hopkins trials.

Early on, Mettes encountered his brother’s wife, Ruth, who died of cancer more than twenty years earlier, at forty-three. Ruth “acted as my tour guide,” he wrote, and “didn’t seem surprised to see me. She ‘wore’ her translucent body so I would know her.” Michelle Obama made an appearance. “The considerable feminine energy all around me made clear the idea that a mother, any mother, regardless of her shortcomings . . . could never NOT love her offspring. This was very powerful. I know I was crying.” He felt as if he were coming out of the womb, “being birthed again.”

Bossis noted that Mettes was crying and breathing heavily. Mettes said, “Birth and death is a lot of work,” and appeared to be convulsing. Then he reached out and clutched Kalliontzi’s hand while pulling his knees up and pushing, as if he were delivering a baby.

“Oh God,” he said, “it all makes sense now, so simple and beautiful.”

Around noon, Mettes asked to take a break. “It was getting too intense,” he wrote. They helped him to the bathroom. “Even the germs were beautiful, as was everything in our world and universe.” Afterward, he was reluctant to “go back in.” He wrote, “The work was considerable but I loved the sense of adventure.” He put on his eye mask and headphones and lay back down.

“From here on, love was the only consideration. It was and is the only purpose. Love seemed to emanate from a single point of light. And it vibrated.” He wrote that “no sensation, no image of beauty, nothing during my time on earth has felt as pure and joyful and glorious as the height of this journey.”

Then, at twelve-ten, he said something that Bossis jotted down: “O.K., we can all punch out now. I get it.”

He went on to take a tour of his lungs, where he “saw two spots.” They were “no big deal.” Mettes recalled, “I was being told (without words) not to worry about the cancer . . . it’s minor in the scheme of things . . . simply an imperfection of your humanity.”

Then he experienced what he called “a brief death.”

“I approached what appeared to be a very sharp, pointed piece of stainless steel. It had a razor blade quality to it. I continued up to the apex of this shiny metal object and as I arrived, I had a choice, to look or not look, over the edge and into the infinite abyss.” He stared into “the vastness of the universe,” hesitant but not frightened. “I wanted to go all in but felt that if I did, I would possibly leave my body permanently,” he wrote. But he “knew there was much more for me here.” Telling his guides about his choice, he explained that he was “not ready to jump off and leave Lisa.”

Around 3 P.M., it was over. “The transition from a state where I had no sense of time or space to the relative dullness of now, happened quickly. I had a headache.”

When Lisa arrived to take him home, Patrick “looked like he had run a race,” she recalled. “The color in his face was not good, he looked tired and sweaty, but he was fired up.” He told her he had touched the face of God.

Bossis was deeply moved by the session. “You’re in this room, but you’re in the presence of something large,” he recalled. “It’s humbling to sit there. It’s the most rewarding day of your career.”

Every guided psychedelic journey is different, but a few themes seem to recur. Several of the cancer patients I interviewed at N.Y.U. and Hopkins described an experience of either giving birth or being born. Many also described an encounter with their cancer that had the effect of diminishing its power over them. Dinah Bazer, a shy woman in her sixties who had been given a diagnosis of ovarian cancer in 2010, screamed at the black mass of fear she encountered while peering into her rib cage: “Fuck you, I won’t be eaten alive!” Since her session, she says, she has stopped worrying about a recurrence—one of the objectives of the trial.

Great secrets of the universe often become clear during the journey, such as “We are all one” or “Love is all that matters.” The usual ratio of wonder to banality in the adult mind is overturned, and such ideas acquire the force of revealed truth. The result is a kind of conversion experience, and the researchers believe that this is what is

responsible for the therapeutic effect.

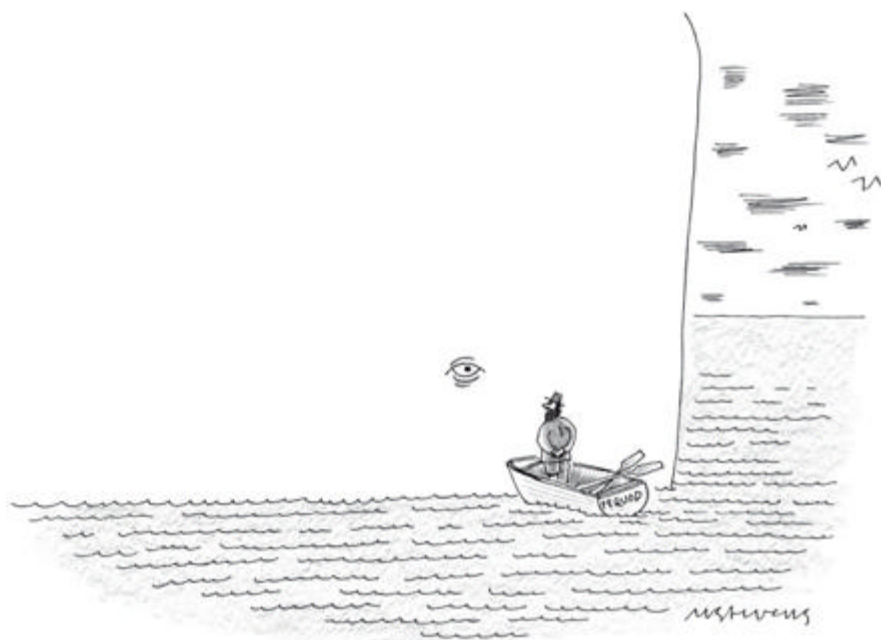
Subjects revelled in their sudden ability to travel seemingly at will through space and time, using it to visit Elizabethan England, the banks of the Ganges, or Wordsworthian scenes from their childhood. The impediment of a body is gone, as is one’s identity, yet, paradoxically, a perceiving and recording “I” still exists. Several volunteers used the metaphor of a camera being pulled back on the scene of their lives, to a point where matters that had once seemed daunting now appeared manageable—smoking, cancer, even death. Their accounts are reminiscent of the “overview effect” described by astronauts who have glimpsed the earth from a great distance, an experience that some of them say permanently altered their priorities. Roland Griffiths likens the therapeutic experience of psilocybin to a kind of “inverse P.T.S.D.”—“a discrete event that produces persisting positive changes in attitudes, moods, and behavior, and presumably in the brain.”

Death looms large in the journeys taken by the cancer patients. A woman I’ll call Deborah Ames, a breast-cancer survivor in her sixties (she asked not to be identified), described zipping through space as if in a video game until she arrived at the wall of a crematorium and realized, with a fright, “I’ve died and now I’m going to be cremated. The next thing I know, I’m below the ground in this gorgeous forest, deep woods, loamy and

brown. There are roots all around me and I’m seeing the trees growing, and I’m part of them. It didn’t feel sad or happy, just natural, contented, peaceful. I wasn’t gone. I was part of the earth.” Several patients described edging up to the precipice of death and looking over to the other side. Tammy Burgess, given a diagnosis of ovarian cancer at fifty-five, found herself gazing across “the great plain of consciousness. It was very serene and beautiful. I felt alone but I could reach out and touch anyone I’d ever known. When my time came, that’s where my life would go once it left me and that was O.K.”

I was struck by how the descriptions of psychedelic journeys differed from the typical accounts of dreams. For one thing, most people’s recall of their journey is not just vivid but comprehensive, the narratives they reconstruct seamless and fully accessible, even years later. They don’t regard these narratives as “just a dream,” the evanescent products of fantasy or wish fulfillment, but, rather, as genuine and sturdy experiences. This is the “noetic” quality that students of mysticism often describe: the unmistakable sense that whatever has been learned or witnessed has the authority and the durability of objective truth. “You don’t get that on other drugs,” as Roland Griffiths points out; after the fact, we’re fully aware of, and often embarrassed by, the inauthenticity of the drug experience.

This might help explain why so many



“I’ve been thinking. Maybe we just got off to a bad start.”

cancer patients in the trials reported that their fear of death had lifted or at least abated: they had stared directly at death and come to know something about it, in a kind of dress rehearsal. “A high-dose psychedelic experience is death practice,” Katherine MacLean, the former Hopkins psychologist, said. “You’re losing everything you know to be real, letting go of your ego and your body, and that process can feel like dying.” And yet you don’t die; in fact, some volunteers become convinced by the experience that consciousness may somehow survive the death of their bodies.

In follow-up discussions with Bossis, Patrick Mettes spoke of his body and his cancer as a “type of illusion” and how there might be “something beyond this physical body.” It also became clear that, psychologically, at least, Mettes was doing remarkably well: he was meditating regularly, felt he had become better able to live in the present, and described loving his wife “even more.” In a session in March, two months after his journey, Bossis noted that Mettes “reports feeling the happiest in his life.”

How are we to judge the veracity of the insights gleaned during a psychedelic journey? It’s one thing to conclude that love is all that matters, but quite another to come away from a ther-

apy convinced that “there is another reality” awaiting us after death, as one volunteer put it, or that there is more to the universe—and to consciousness—than a purely materialist world view would have us believe. Is psychedelic therapy simply foisting a comforting delusion on the sick and dying?

“That’s above my pay grade,” Bossis said, with a shrug, when I asked him. Bill Richards cited William James, who suggested that we judge the mystical experience not by its veracity, which is unknowable, but by its fruits: does it turn someone’s life in a positive direction?

Many researchers acknowledge that the power of suggestion may play a role when a drug like psilocybin is administered by medical professionals with legal and institutional sanction: under such conditions, the expectations of the therapist are much more likely to be fulfilled by the patient. (And bad trips are much less likely to occur.) But who cares, some argue, as long as it helps? David Nichols, an emeritus professor of pharmacology at Purdue University—and a founder, in 1993, of the Heffter Research Institute, a key funder of psychedelic research—put the pragmatic case most baldly in a recent interview with *Science*: “If it gives them peace, if it helps people to die peacefully with their friends and their family at their

side, I don’t care if it’s real or an illusion.”

Roland Griffiths is willing to consider the challenge that the mystical experience poses to the prevailing scientific paradigm. He conceded that “authenticity is a scientific question not yet answered” and that all that scientists have to go by is what people tell them about their experiences. But he pointed out that the same is true for much more familiar mental phenomena.

“What about the miracle that we are conscious? Just think about that for a second, that we are aware we’re aware!” Insofar as I was on board for one miracle well beyond the reach of materialist science, Griffiths was suggesting, I should remain open to the possibility of others.

“I’m willing to hold that there’s a mystery here we don’t understand, that these experiences may or may not be ‘true,’” he said. “What’s exciting is to use the tools we have to explore and pick apart this mystery.”

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to pick apart the scientific mystery of the psychedelic experience has been taking place in a lab based at Imperial College, in London. There a thirty-four-year-old neuroscientist named Robin Carhart-Harris has been injecting healthy volunteers with psilocybin and LSD and then using a variety of scanning tools—including fMRI and magnetoencephalography (MEG)—to observe what happens in their brains.

Carhart-Harris works in the laboratory of David Nutt, a prominent English psychopharmacologist. Nutt served as the drug-policy adviser to the Labour Government until 2011, when he was fired for arguing that psychedelic drugs should be rescheduled on the ground that they are safer than alcohol or tobacco and potentially invaluable to neuroscience. Carhart-Harris’s own path to neuroscience was an eccentric one. First, he took a graduate course in psychoanalysis—a field that few neuroscientists take seriously, regarding it less as a science than as a set of untestable beliefs. Carhart-Harris was fascinated by psychoanalytic theory but frustrated by the paucity of its tools for exploring what it deemed most important about the mind: the unconscious.

“If the only way we can access the unconscious mind is via dreams and free



“Your first perp walk, Your Honor?”

association, we aren't going to get anywhere," he said. "Surely there must be something else." One day, he asked his seminar leader if that might be a drug. She was intrigued. He set off to search the library catalogue for "LSD and the Unconscious" and found "Realms of the Human Unconscious," by Stanislov Grof. "I read the book cover to cover. That set the course for the rest of my young life."

Carhart-Harris, who is slender and intense, with large pale-blue eyes that seldom blink, decided that he would use psychedelic drugs and modern brain-imaging techniques to put a foundation of hard science beneath psychoanalysis. "Freud said dreams were the royal road to the unconscious," he said in our first interview. "LSD may turn out to be the superhighway." Nutt agreed to let him follow this hunch in his lab. He ran bureaucratic interference and helped secure funding (from the Beckley Foundation, which supports psychedelic research).

When, in 2010, Carhart-Harris first began studying the brains of volunteers on psychedelics, neuroscientists assumed that the drugs somehow excited brain activity—hence the vivid hallucinations and powerful emotions that people report. But when Carhart-Harris looked at the results of the first set of fMRI scans—which pinpoint areas of brain activity by mapping local blood flow and oxygen consumption—he discovered that the drug appeared to substantially reduce brain activity in one particular region: the "default-mode network."

The default-mode network was first described in 2001, in a landmark paper by Marcus Raichle, a neurologist at Washington University, in St. Louis, and it has since become the focus of much discussion in neuroscience. The network comprises a critical and centrally situated hub of brain activity that links parts of the cerebral cortex to deeper, older structures in the brain, such as the limbic system and the hippocampus.

The network, which consumes a significant portion of the brain's energy, appears to be most active when we are least engaged in attending to the world or to a task. It lights up when we are daydreaming, removed from sensory processing, and engaging in higher-level "meta-cognitive" processes such as self-reflection, mental time travel, rumination, and "theory of mind"—the ability

to attribute mental states to others. Carhart-Harris describes the default-mode network variously as the brain's "orchestra conductor" or "corporate executive" or "capital city," charged with managing and "holding the entire system together." It is thought to be the physical counterpart of the autobiographical self, or ego.

"The brain is a hierarchical system," Carhart-Harris said. "The highest-level parts"—such as the default-mode network—"have an inhibitory influence on the lower-level parts, like emotion and memory." He discovered that blood flow and electrical activity in the default-mode network dropped off precipitously under the influence of psychedelics, a finding that may help to explain the loss of the sense of self that volunteers reported. (The biggest dropoffs in default-mode-network activity correlated with volunteers' reports of ego dissolution.) Just before Carhart-Harris published his results, in a 2012 paper in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, a researcher at Yale named Judson Brewer, who was using fMRI to study the brains of experienced meditators, noticed that their default-mode networks had also been quieted relative to those of novice meditators. It appears that, with the ego temporarily out of commission, the boundaries between self and world, subject and object, all dissolve. These are hallmarks of the mystical experience.

If the default-mode network functions as the conductor of the symphony of brain activity, we might expect its temporary disappearance from the stage to lead to an increase in dissonance and mental disorder—as appears to happen during the psychedelic journey. Carhart-Harris has found evidence in scans of brain waves that, when the default-mode network shuts down, other brain regions "are let off the leash." Mental contents hidden from view (or suppressed) during normal waking consciousness come to the fore: emotions, memories, wishes and fears. Regions that don't ordinarily communicate directly with one another strike up conversations (neuroscientists sometimes call this "crosstalk"), often with bizarre results.

Carhart-Harris thinks that hallucinations occur when the visual-processing centers of the brain, left to their own devices, become more susceptible to the influence of our beliefs and emotions.

Carhart-Harris doesn't romanticize psychedelics, and he has little patience for the sort of "magical thinking" and "metaphysics" they promote. In his view, the forms of consciousness that psychedelics unleash are regressions to a more "primitive style of cognition." Following Freud, he says that the mystical experience—whatever its source—returns us to the psychological condition of the infant, who has yet to develop a sense of himself as a bounded individual. The pinnacle of human development is the achievement of

the ego, which imposes order on the anarchy of a primitive mind buffeted by magical thinking. (The developmental psychologist Alison Gopnik has speculated that the way young children perceive the world has much in common with the psychedelic experience. As she puts it, "They're basically tripping all the time.") The psychoanalytic value of psychedelics, in his view, is that they allow us to bring the workings of the unconscious mind "into an observable space."

In "The Doors of Perception," Aldous Huxley concluded from his psychedelic experience that the conscious mind is less a window on reality than a furious editor of it. The mind is a "reducing valve," he wrote, eliminating far more reality than it admits to our conscious awareness, lest we be overwhelmed. "What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive." Psychedelics open the valve wide, removing the filter that hides much of reality, as well as dimensions of our own minds, from ordinary consciousness. Carhart-Harris has cited Huxley's metaphor in some of his papers, likening the default-mode network to the reducing valve, but he does not agree that everything that comes through the opened doors of perception is necessarily real. The psychedelic experience, he suggests, can yield a lot of "fool's gold."

Nevertheless, Carhart-Harris believes that the psychedelic experience can help



people by relaxing the grip of an overbearing ego and the rigid, habitual thinking it enforces. The human brain is perhaps the most complex system there is, and the emergence of a conscious self is its highest achievement. By adulthood, the mind has become very good at observing and testing reality and developing confident predictions about it that optimize our investments of energy (mental and otherwise) and therefore our survival. Much of what we think of as perceptions of the world are really educated guesses based on past experience ("That fractal pattern of little green bits in my visual field must be a tree"), and this kind of conventional thinking serves us well.

But only up to a point. In Carhart-Harris's view, a steep price is paid for the achievement of order and ego in the adult mind. "We give up our emotional lability," he told me, "our ability to be open to surprises, our ability to think flexibly, and our ability to value nature." The sovereign ego can become a despot. This is perhaps most evident in depression, when the self turns on itself and uncontrollable introspection gradually shades out reality. In "The Entropic Brain," a paper published last year in *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, Carhart-Harris cites research indicating that this debilitating state, sometimes called "heavy self-consciousness," may be the result of a "hyperactive" default-mode network. The lab recently received government funding to conduct a clinical study using psychedelics to treat depression.

Carhart-Harris believes that people suffering from other mental disorders characterized by excessively rigid patterns of thinking, such as addiction and obsessive-compulsive disorder, could benefit from psychedelics, which "disrupt stereotyped patterns of thought and behavior." In his view, all these disorders are, in a sense, ailments of the ego. He also thinks that this disruption could promote more creative thinking. It may be that some brains could benefit from a little less order.

Existential distress at the end of life bears many of the psychological hallmarks of a hyperactive default-mode network, including excessive self-reflection and an inability to jump the deepening grooves of negative thought. The ego, faced with the prospect of its own dissolution, becomes hypervigilant, with-

drawing its investment in the world and other people. It is striking that a single psychedelic experience—an intervention that Carhart-Harris calls "shaking the snow globe"—should have the power to alter these patterns in a lasting way.

This appears to be the case for many of the patients in the clinical trial of psilocybin just concluded at Hopkins and N.Y.U. Patrick Mettes lived for seventeen months after his psilocybin journey, and, according to Lisa, he enjoyed many unexpected satisfactions in that time, along with a dawning acceptance of death.

"We still had our arguments," Lisa recalled. "And we had a very trying summer," as they endured a calamitous apartment renovation. But Patrick "had a sense of patience he had never had before, and with me he had real joy about things," she said. "It was as if he had been relieved of the duty of caring about the details of life. Now it was about being with people, enjoying his sandwich and the walk on the promenade. It was as if we lived a lifetime in a year."

After the psilocybin session, Mettes spent his good days walking around the city. "He would walk everywhere, try every restaurant for lunch, and tell me about all these great places he'd discovered. But his good days got fewer and fewer." In March, 2012, he stopped chemo. "He didn't want to die," she said. "But I think he just decided that this is not how he wanted to live."

In April, his lungs failing, Mettes wound up back in the hospital. "He gathered everyone together and said goodbye, and explained that this is how he wanted to die. He had a very conscious death."

Mettes's equanimity exerted a powerful influence on everyone around him, Lisa said, and his room in the palliative-care unit at Mt. Sinai became a center of gravity. "Everyone, the nurses and the doctors, wanted to hang out in our room—they just didn't want to leave. Patrick would talk and talk. He put out so much love." When Tony Bossis visited Mettes the week before he died, he was struck by Mettes's serenity. "He was consoling me. He said his biggest sadness was leaving his wife. But he was not afraid."

Lisa took a picture of Patrick a few days before he died, and when it popped open on my screen it momentarily took

my breath away: a gaunt man in a hospital gown, an oxygen clip in his nose, but with shining blue eyes and a broad smile.

Lisa stayed with him in his hospital room night after night, the two of them often talking into the morning hours. "I feel like I have one foot in this world and one in the next," he told her at one point. Lisa told me, "One of the last nights we were together, he said, 'Honey, don't push me. I'm finding my way.'"

Lisa hadn't had a shower in days, and her brother encouraged her to go home for a few hours. Minutes before she returned, Patrick slipped away. "He wasn't going to die as long as I was there," she said. "My brother had told me, 'You need to let him go.'"

Lisa said she feels indebted to the people running the N.Y.U. trial and is convinced that the psilocybin experience "allowed him to tap into his own deep resources. That, I think, is what these mind-altering drugs do."

Despite the encouraging results from the N.Y.U. and Hopkins trials, much stands in the way of the routine use of psychedelic therapy. "We don't die well in America," Bossis recently said over lunch at a restaurant near the N.Y.U. medical center. "Ask people where they want to die, and they will tell you at home, with their loved ones. But most of us die in an I.C.U. The biggest taboo in American medicine is the conversation about death. To a doctor, it's a defeat to let a patient go." Bossis and several of his colleagues described the considerable difficulty they had recruiting patients from N.Y.U.'s cancer center for the psilocybin trials. "I'm busy trying to keep my patients alive," one oncologist told Gabrielle Agin-Liebes, the trial's project manager. Only when reports of positive experiences began to filter back to the cancer center did nurses there—not doctors—begin to tell patients about the trial.

Recruitment is only one of the many challenges facing a Phase III trial of psilocybin, which would involve hundreds of patients at multiple locations and cost millions of dollars. The University of Wisconsin and the University of California, Los Angeles, are making plans to participate in such a trial, but F.D.A. approval is not guaranteed. If the trial

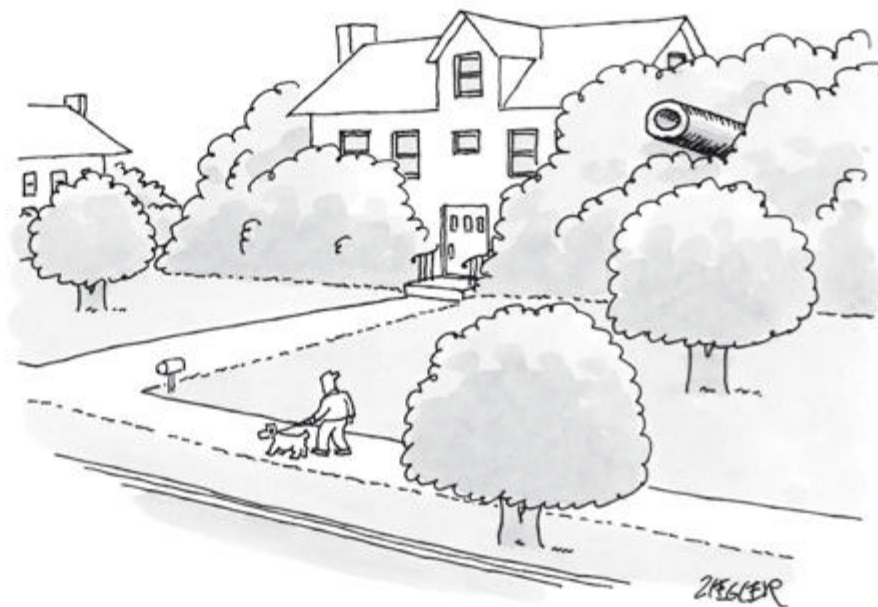
was successful, the government would be under pressure to reschedule psilocybin under the Controlled Substances Act, having recognized a medical use for the drug.

Also, it seems unlikely that the government would ever fund such a study. “The N.I.M.H. is not opposed to work with psychedelics, but I doubt we would make a major investment,” Tom Insel, the institute’s director, told me. He said that the N.I.M.H. would need to see “a path to development” and suspects that “it would be very difficult to get a pharmaceutical company interested in developing this drug, since it cannot be patented.” It’s also unlikely that Big Pharma would have any interest in a drug that is administered only once or twice in the course of treatment. “There’s not a lot of money here when you can be cured with one session,” Bossis pointed out. Still, Bob Jesse and Rick Doblin are confident that they will find private money for a Phase III clinical trial, and several private funders I spoke to indicated that it would be forthcoming.

Many of the researchers and therapists I interviewed are confident that psychedelic therapy will eventually become routine. Katherine MacLean hopes someday to establish a “psychedelic hospice,” a retreat center where the dying and their loved ones can use psychedelics to help them all let go. “If we limit psychedelics just to the patient, we’re sticking with the old medical model,” she said. “But psychedelics are so much more radical than that. I get nervous when people say they should only be prescribed by a doctor.”

In MacLean’s thinking, one hears echoes of the excitement of the sixties about the potential of psychedelics to help a wide range of people, and the impatience with the cumbersome structures of medicine. It was precisely this exuberance about psychedelics, and the frustration with the slow pace of science, that helped fuel the backlash against them.

Still, “the betterment of well people,” to borrow a phrase of Bob Jesse’s, is very much on the minds of most of the researchers I interviewed, some of whom were more reluctant to discuss it on the record than institutional outsiders like Jesse and MacLean. For them, medical acceptance is a first step to a broader cultural acceptance. Jesse would like to see the drugs administered by skilled



guides working in “longitudinal multi-generational contexts”—which, as he describes them, sound a lot like church communities. Others envisage a time when people seeking a psychedelic experience—whether for reasons of mental health or spiritual seeking or simple curiosity—could go to something like a “mental-health club,” as Julie Holland, a psychiatrist formerly at Bellevue, described it: “Sort of like a cross between a spa/retreat and a gym where people can experience psychedelics in a safe, supportive environment.” All spoke of the importance of well-trained guides (N.Y.U. has plans for a training program in psychedelic therapy) and the need to help people afterward “integrate” the powerful experiences they have had in order to render them truly useful. This is not something that happens when these drugs are used recreationally. Bossis paraphrases Huston Smith on this point: “A spiritual experience does not by itself make a spiritual life.”

When I asked Rick Doblin if he worries about another backlash, he suggested that the culture has made much progress since the nineteen-sixties. “That was a very different time,” he said. “People wouldn’t even talk about cancer or death then. Women were tranquilized to give birth; men weren’t allowed in the delivery room. Yoga and meditation were totally weird. Now mindfulness is mainstream and everyone does yoga, and there are birthing centers and hospices all over.

We’ve integrated all these things into our culture. And now I think we’re ready to integrate psychedelics.” He also points out that many of the people in charge of our institutions today have personal experience with psychedelics and so feel less threatened by them.

Bossis would like to believe in Doblin’s sunny forecast, and he hopes that “the legacy of this work” will be the routine use of psychedelics in palliative care. But he also thinks that the medical use of psychedelics could easily run into resistance. “This culture has a fear of death, a fear of transcendence, and a fear of the unknown, all of which are embodied in this work.” Psychedelics may be too disruptive for our society and institutions ever to embrace them.

The first time I raised the idea of “the betterment of well people” with Roland Griffiths, he shifted in his chair and chose his words carefully. “Culturally, right now, that’s a dangerous idea to promote,” he said. And yet, as we talked, it became clear that he, too, feels that many of us stand to benefit from these molecules and, even more, from the spiritual experiences they can make available.

“We are all terminal,” Griffiths said. “We’re all dealing with death. This will be far too valuable to limit to sick people.” ♦

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Inside N.Y.U.’s psilocybin-treatment room.

ALL ABOUT THE HAMILTONS

A new musical brings the Founding Fathers back to life—with a lot of hip-hop.

BY REBECCA MEAD

In April, 2009, Lin-Manuel Miranda, a writer, composer, and performer, received a call from the White House. The new President and the First Lady were planning to host an evening of live performances centered on “the American experience,” and Miranda was invited to participate. Miranda, who was twenty-nine, had spent the previous year starring in the Broadway musical “In the Heights,” of which he was the composer and lyricist. Set in Washington Heights, the show incorporated salsa and merengue with rap and hip-hop, blending them with more conventional Broadway tropes, to winning effect. “Heights” had won four Tony awards, including those for Best Musical and Best Original Score, and Miranda had accepted the latter with an effervescent rap that invoked “Sunday in the Park with George”: “Mr. Sondheim/Look, I made a hat!/Where there never was a hat!/It’s a Latin hat at that!” (He then pulled a Puerto Rican flag from the pocket of his tuxedo.) The White House likely expected Miranda to perform something invoking the Latin-American experience, and he was told that a number from “In the Heights” would be welcome.

Miranda had something different in mind. A few months earlier, he and his girlfriend, Vanessa Nadal, who has since become his wife, had been on vacation in Mexico, and while bobbing in the pool on an inflatable lounge he started to read a book that he had bought on impulse: Ron Chernow’s eight-hundred-page biography of Alexander Hamilton. Miranda was seized by the story of Hamilton’s early life. Born out of wedlock, raised in poverty in St. Croix, abandoned by his father, and orphaned by his mother as a child, Hamilton transplanted himself as an adolescent to a New York City filled with revolutionary fervor. An eloquent and prolific writer, he was the author of two-thirds

of the Federalist Papers; after serving as George Washington’s aide during the Revolutionary War, he became America’s first Treasury Secretary. Later, Hamilton achieved the dubious distinction of being at the center of the nation’s first political sex scandal, after an extramarital affair became public. He never again held office, and before reaching the age of fifty he was dead, killed in a duel by Aaron Burr, the Vice-President, after a personal dispute escalated beyond remediation.

Miranda saw Hamilton’s relentless-ness, brilliance, linguistic dexterity, and self-destructive stubbornness through his own idiosyncratic lens. It was, he thought, a hip-hop story, an immigrant’s story. Hamilton reminded him of his father, Luis A. Miranda, Jr., who, as an ambitious youth in provincial Puerto Rico, had graduated from college before turning eighteen, then moved to New York to pursue graduate studies at N.Y.U. Luis Miranda served as a special adviser on Hispanic affairs to Mayor Ed Koch; he then co-founded a political consulting company, the MirRam Group, advising Fernando Ferrer, among others. On summer breaks during high school, Lin-Manuel worked in his father’s office; later, he wrote jingles for the political ads of several MirRam clients, including Eliot Spitzer, in his 2006 gubernatorial bid. Chernow’s description of the contentious election season of 1800—the origin of modern political campaigning—resonated with Miranda’s understanding of the inner workings of politics. And the kinds of debate that Hamilton and his peers had about the purpose of government still took place, on MSNBC and Fox.

Hamilton also reminded Miranda of Tupac Shakur, the West Coast rapper who was shot to death in 1996. Shakur wrote intricate, socially nuanced lyrics: Miranda particularly admired “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” a verse narrative about a

twelve-year-old girl who turns to prostitution after giving birth to her molester’s child. Shakur was also extremely undiplomatic, publicly calling out rappers he hated. Miranda recognized a similar rhetorical talent in Hamilton, and a similar, fatal failure to know when enough was enough. There was extraordinary dramatic potential in Hamilton’s story: the characteristics that allowed him to rise also insured his fall. When the organizers of the White House event called, Miranda proposed a rap about Hamilton, and they said yes.

That evening in May, Miranda and the other performers—among them Esperanza Spalding, the jazz bassist and vocalist, and James Earl Jones—were introduced to the President. Miranda asked him to sign a copy of “Dreams from My Father” that he’d bought at the airport. Onstage, Miranda announced that he was working on a concept album about Hamilton—“someone I think embodies hip-hop,” he said, to general laughter. He did not mention that he had written only one song. After Miranda explained that Hamilton represented “the word’s ability to make a difference,” he launched into complex lyrics that condensed the first twenty years of Hamilton’s life into four minutes. Slight of build, with dark cropped hair and thick stubble, Miranda paced the stage with coiled energy, rapping of “the ten-dollar Founding Father without a father/Got a lot farther by working a lot harder/By being a lot smarter/By being a self-starter.” His performance ignited a rising murmur of delight among the audience, and the Obamas were rapt: Miranda later heard that the President’s first reaction was to remark that Timothy Geithner had to see this.

Six years later, that song has become the first number of “Hamilton,” which opens at the Public Theatre on February 17th, with Miranda in the title role. Rooted in hip-hop, but also



Lin-Manuel Miranda, the composer, lyricist, and star of "Hamilton," says that Alexander Hamilton reminds him of Tupac Shakur.

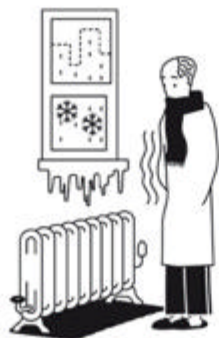
encompassing R.&B., jazz, pop, Tin Pan Alley, and the choral strains of contemporary Broadway, the show is an achievement of historical and cultural reimagining. In Miranda's telling, the headlong rise of one self-made immigrant becomes the story of America. Hamilton announces himself in a signature refrain: "Hey, yo, I'm just like my country/I'm young, scrappy and hungry/And I'm not throwing away my shot," and these words could equally apply to his dramatizer. Miranda has used as his Twitter avatar Hamilton's portrait on the ten-dollar bill, slyly tweaked to incorporate Miranda's dark eyes, humorously set mouth, and goatee.

"Hamilton" is not a gimmicky transposition of early American history to a contemporary urban setting. Miranda's Founding Fathers wear velvet frock coats and knee britches, not hoodies and jeans. The set, by David Korins, is a wooden scaffold against exposed brick; the warm lighting suggests candlelight, and the stage is equipped with ropes and iron fixtures that evoke the shipbuilding—and nation-building—of eighteenth-century New York City.

Miranda presents an Alexander Hamilton of incandescent focus, abounding talent, and barely suppressed fury. Hamilton was known to pace and mutter to himself while composing his treatises, and onstage the rap soliloquy feels startlingly apt as his preferred mode of self-expression: "I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory/When is it gonna get me?/In my sleep?/Seven feet ahead of me?/If I see it coming do I run or do I let it be?" Miranda transposes Cabinet meetings into rap battles where participants face off while surrounded by whooping supporters. The debate over whether a national bank should be established to assume the states' debts—Hamilton's farsighted invention—becomes an animated exchange, in which he emerges victorious by disparaging Thomas Jefferson: "Always hesitant with the President/Reticent—there isn't a plan he doesn't jettison."

It does not seem accidental that "Hamilton" was created during the

tenure of the first African-American President. The musical presents the birth of the nation in an unfamiliar but necessary light: not solely as the work of elite white men but as the foundational story of all Americans. Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington are all played by African-Americans. Miranda also gives prominent roles to women, including Hamilton's wife, Eliza Schuyler (Phillipa Soo), and sister-in-law, Angelica Schuyler (Renée Elise Goldsberry). When they are joined by a third sister, their zigzagging harmonies sound rather like those of *Destiny's Child*. Miranda portrays the Founding Fathers not as exalted statesmen but



as orphaned sons, reckless revolutionaries, and sometimes petty rivals, living at a moment of extreme volatility, opportunity, and risk. The achievements and the dangers of America's current moment—under the Presidency of a fatherless son of an immigrant, born in the country's island margins—are never far from view.

Oskar Eustis, who marks his ten-year anniversary as the artistic director of the Public with this production, says that "Hamilton" is the most exciting new work he has been involved with in years—perhaps since Tony Kushner's "Angels in America," which he commissioned, and directed in its premiere production, in 1992. He sees a connection between Miranda's creation and the *Henriad*, Shakespeare's early cycle of history plays: "What Lin is doing is taking the vernacular of the streets and elevating it to verse. That is what hip-hop is, and that is what iambic pentameter was. Lin is telling the story of the founding of his country in such a way as to make everyone present feel they have a stake in their country. In heightened verse form, Shakespeare told England's national story to the audience at the Globe, and helped make England England—helped give it its self-consciousness. That is exactly what Lin is doing with 'Hamilton.' By telling the story of the founding of the country through the eyes of a bastard, immigrant orphan,

told entirely by people of color, he is saying, 'This is our country. We get to lay claim to it.'"

One bright day in October, Miranda and his closest collaborator, Thomas Kail, the director of both "In the Heights" and "Hamilton," climbed into a town car outside the Public Theatre and headed for Hamilton Park, in Weehawken, New Jersey. In the years since Miranda first conceived of "Hamilton," he has worked on several other projects: co-writing "Bring It On: The Musical," an adaptation of the movie about cheerleading, which played on Broadway in 2012; appearing on "Modern Family" and "How I Met Your Mother"; performing with an improvisational hip-hop comedy group, *Free-style Love Supreme*, which plays at Joe's Pub and other venues, and whose debut TV series aired last fall. All along, he was writing songs and mounting periodic readings of his work-in-progress. In 2012, he staged a concert production of songs from "Hamilton" at Lincoln Center's American Songbook series; in the *Times*, Stephen Holden hailed it as "an obvious game changer."

While Miranda was working on the musical, he read Hamilton's voluminous correspondence and published works, and he visited sites in New York City that bear the traces of Revolutionary history, like Fraunces Tavern, on Pearl Street, where, after the defeat of the British, George Washington delivered a tearful farewell address to his officers. For a while, Miranda was granted a writing space at the Morris-Jumel Mansion, near West 162nd Street. Now a national historic landmark, it is the oldest surviving house in Manhattan. Washington used the mansion as his headquarters during the Battle of Harlem Heights, and it later became the home of Vice-President Burr. "I met with the head of the Museum of American Finance, and he showed me the plaque on the side of an office building that says, 'This was Thomas Jefferson's residence in New York,'" Miranda said. "I love that we are just a bunch of layers above where all this shit went down." Ron Chernow, who met Miranda a few months before the White House performance, became a historical consultant for the show. "Lin never gratuitously invents anything,"

Chernow says. "He tries first to stick to the facts, and if he has to deviate from the facts I have found that there is always a very good reason for him doing it. I said to him, 'Do you want me to tell you when I see historical errors?' And he said, 'Absolutely. I want the historians to respect this.'"

The Weehawken trip was to a site Miranda had not yet visited: the duelling ground where, in July, 1804, Burr shot Hamilton, who died of his wounds the next day. At the time, duelling was outlawed in New York but tolerated in New Jersey. "Hamilton" dramatizes three duels between three pairs of combatants, and the second two prove fatal, including one in which Hamilton's son Philip participates. "A duel was like arbitration is now," Miranda said, with wonder. "It was, like, 'Oh, well, we are not going to settle this, we are going to have to go to a field in Jersey. Bring some arms and a doctor.'"

Although Miranda had spent years developing the script, he remained unsure how to portray the final moments of Hamilton's life. Among other difficulties, the historical record lacked clarity: Burr shot Hamilton on the first draw, claiming afterward that he had been convinced by his opponent's behavior—the way he examined his gun, the fact that he put on his glasses—that Hamilton also meant to shoot in earnest. Hamilton, however, left behind multiple letters that suggested he intended to aim away from Burr—to throw away his shot—and eyewitnesses later reported that he fired into the air.

At a workshop production in May, Miranda had delivered a final rap in which Hamilton gives an account of his preparations—"The sun is in my eyes and I'm almost giddy/As I watch it slowly rise over my New York City"—and weighs whether or not Burr has it in him to kill. Both musically and lyrically, the song hadn't conveyed the high stakes that Miranda sought to capture, in which Hamilton's fears about Burr's lack of integrity extended to broad trepidation about the uncertain direction of the country. Nor had the song fully delivered a sense of tragic inevitability, in which Hamilton's uncharacteristic reticence and Burr's uncharacteristic forwardness ruin the lives of both men. Miranda was still revising the song, and

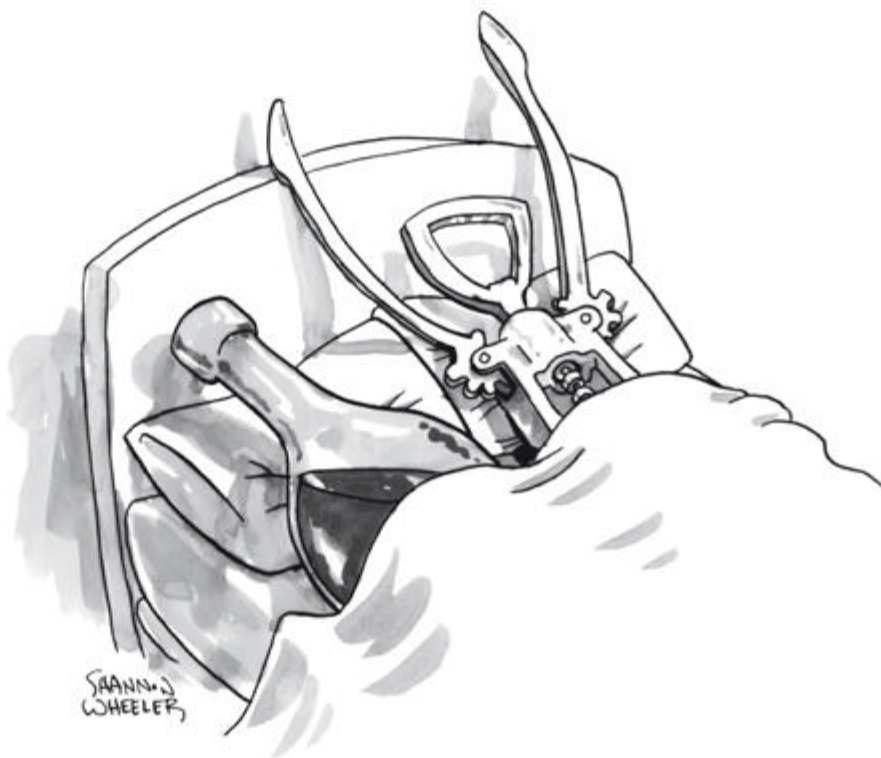
expected to be still worrying over the scene in rehearsals. He said, "There are things that don't exist, and that are not going to exist, until we have actors in the room, and I go, 'Oh!'" Kail, who sets deadlines for Miranda, and reacts to every draft of every song, explained, "Lin's response to pressure is to generate more material."

The fraught relationship between Burr and Hamilton is at the center of Miranda's show. In the opening number, Burr introduces Hamilton as a "bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman": lyrics derived from a contemptuous description by John Adams. Burr was born to privilege—his father was the president of the college that became Princeton University, and Jonathan Edwards was his maternal grandfather—but, like Hamilton, he was orphaned at an early age, studied law, and turned to politics. In Miranda's telling, they are negative images of each other, Hamilton's heated recklessness contrasting with Burr's icy caution. "Hamilton is this orphan with nothing to lose, and Burr is this orphan with everything to lose," Miranda says.

Establishing Burr as a foil to Hamilton was suggested not just by the historical record but also by musical-theatre precedent. In "Jesus Christ Superstar," Judas narrates, and Miranda

was attracted to the idea of showing Hamilton as he is observed by his nemesis. Stephen Sondheim, who enlisted Miranda to translate some of the lyrics in "West Side Story" into Spanish for the show's 2009 revival, appreciates Miranda's respect for the art form's history: "A lot of contemporary songwriters for the theatre are not the least bit interested in what went before. But Lin knows where musical theatre comes from, and he cares about where it comes from." Miranda brought the first few songs from "Hamilton" to Sondheim a few years ago. "I was knocked out—I thought it was wonderful," Sondheim says. "They seemed so fresh and meticulous and theatrical."

Miranda shares Sondheim's attention to uniting rhyme scheme with musical phrasing. But while composing "Hamilton" he also took inspiration from other, highly commercial Broadway scores. "I really got my 'Les Miz' on in this score, like being really smart about where to reintroduce a theme," he said. "In terms of how it accesses your tear ducts, nothing does it better than that show." "Hamilton" also pays winking respect to other musical precursors. Aaron Burr advises Hamilton and other would-be revolutionaries to temper their outrage with a line lifted from "South Pacific": "I'm with you but



the situation is fraught/You've got to be carefully taught." "That's our little Rodgers-and-Hammerstein-racism quote," Miranda said, as the town car drove through the Lincoln Tunnel toward New Jersey. George Washington, who is played by Christopher Jackson, one of the co-stars of "In the Heights," refers to himself ironically as "The model of a modern major general/the venerated Virginian veteran whose men are all/Lining up, to put me on a pedestal." It's a reference to "The Pirates of Penzance" and, in Miranda's opinion, an improvement on Gilbert and Sullivan: "I always felt like 'mineral' wasn't the best possible rhyme."

Miranda's score makes targeted use of musical genres, too. King George serenades his departing colony with a number titled "You'll Be Back," which echoes British pop—the Beatles, but on the harpsichord—with witty, melodious menace. ("When push / Comes to shove/I will send a fully armed battalion/To remind you of my love," Brian d'Arcy James, as the haughty monarch, sings.) Miranda underscores the generational difference between Hamilton and Jefferson, who was a dozen years older, by giving Jefferson—just returned from Paris—a jazz-inflected number entitled "What'd I Miss?" Jefferson is played by the rapper Daveed Diggs, who has put his international touring schedule on hold for "Hamilton." He says, "Lin exists at the intersection of a bunch of worlds that don't often intersect. He happens to be a devoted fan of rap music, he happens to be a really talented rapper and freestyler, and he also grew up engaged in musical theatre. Everything that comes out seems so authentic."

The pop music of the early nineties—the soundtrack of Miranda's youth—is woven into the score. Listeners may pick up allusions to the Fugees, Mobb Deep, Brand Nubian. The show makes multiple references to the Notorious B.I.G., the New York rapper Christopher Wallace, who was shot to death in 1997, at the age of twenty-four. When Hamilton introduces himself, he spells out his name in the celebrated cadence that Wallace used in his song "Going Back to Cali." Miranda takes particular pleasure in a song called "Duel Commandments," a riff on "The Ten Crack Commandments," Wallace's primer on

how to deal drugs. The song appears during the show's first duel, in which Hamilton and Burr serve as the seconds for the combatants; in the May workshop, Miranda reprised the counting structure in the fatal duel between Hamilton and Burr. Kail, the director, explained, "We needed to set up the duel between Hamilton and Burr—because you know Hamilton is going to die—so the groundwork of that, structurally, made a lot of sense to us. But having it be something so loved by hip-hop fans was also a way of saying that these folks from long ago were doing the same things that Biggie was talking about fifteen years ago." Miranda nodded. "It's a song about illegal activity, and how it works," he said. "And we're both stealing the structure from Moses."

After arriving at Weehawken's stretch of the Palisades, Miranda and Kail hunted in vain for some indication of where Hamilton fell. A marble obelisk commemorating Hamilton had been placed at the duel site as early as 1806, but it was destroyed within a few years; later, train tracks were laid along the foot of the cliff, eradicating the dueling ground. Eventually, Miranda and Kail spotted a pillar that had been topped, in the nineteen-nineties, by a small bust of Hamilton. The memorial, opposite the axis of Forty-second Street, was surprisingly diminutive: Jefferson or Washington would surely have merited a full statue.

The memorial was behind a locked gate, and Miranda climbed on a low wall to look down the cliff's edge, past scrub and trees, to apartment complexes below. "I didn't expect it to be this manicured," he said. "I thought there would be some woods for us to walk around in. When I picture it in my mind's eye, I picture the wood across from where I grew up, just kind of grimy and hidden. I don't think this is going to replace that in my head." Miranda took a picture on his phone of the view of Manhattan across the Hudson. "Made the pilgrimage," he later tweeted.

The composer of "In the Heights" grew up not in Washington Heights but thirty blocks farther uptown, across from Inwood Hill Park, the site of the last natural forest in Manhattan. Miranda was the second of two children:

his older sister, Luz Miranda-Crespo, trained as an engineer, and is now the C.F.O. of the MirRam Group. (Lin-Manuel's unusual name was inspired by a poem about the Vietnam War, "Nana Roja Para Mi Hijo Lin Manuel," by the Puerto Rican writer José Manuel Torres Santiago, which Luis Miranda read as a teen-ager and filed away for future use.) His mother, who was born in Puerto Rico but immigrated to New York as an infant, is a clinical psychologist. Edmunda Claudio, a live-in nanny, joined the family from Puerto Rico, and Miranda calls her *abuela*—grandmother. "My parents worked so much that I really remember them only on weekends," he says. "My dad and I would go and see an action movie, and then we would go and play Ping-Pong or pool. They were like weekend visits, even though we all lived in the same house."

In the summers, he and his sister would go to Puerto Rico to stay with their grandparents and improve their language skills. (Miranda's Spanish is good, but not equal to that of a native speaker.) High achievement was expected from both children, academically and culturally. Luis taught them to dance salsa. "For me, that was very, very important—that they learned how to dance," he says. The family was of a mixed economic background: one of Miranda's great-uncles, on his father's side, was the founder of the Independence Party in Puerto Rico, but other relatives were solidly working class. At five, Miranda tested into Hunter College Elementary School—the only child he knew from his neighborhood to do so. "I can't imagine what that was like for my Puerto Rican father," he says. "All my friends were Jewish, because that is who goes to Hunter. I was Lin at school, and Lin-Manuel at home. I was a totally different person at home than I was at school. All my friends lived on the Upper West Side or the Upper East Side, and I'd speak to their nannies in Spanish."

Miranda started taking piano lessons at six. "The teacher did a recital, and each of the kids played a couple of songs," Luis Miranda recalls. "After Lin-Manuel played his first song and people applauded, he played his second one; then he was, like, 'I know another one, I know another one,' and we had

to pull him off, because he loved the applause.” His showmanship sometimes extended to his homework assignments: in place of a third-grade report on Jean Merrill’s “The Pushcart War,” he submitted a short video in which he enlisted family members to reenact the book’s events while he delivered a precocious narration in a newscaster’s suit

money for Broadway outings, but Miranda was taken to see “the Holy Trinity: ‘Les Miz,’ ‘Phantom,’ ‘Cats.’” He says, “I remember seeing ‘Les Miz’ when I was seven. I cried when Fantine died, fell asleep for a while, woke back up in time for Javert’s suicide—that is actually a great way to experience that show. When I saw ‘Cats,’ I remember being

rected “West Side Story.” “I had no Latino men in the Sharks—they were various shades of brown, and Asian,” he recalls. “So my dad came in and did accent work with the Sharks. It was us teaching these kids how to be Latino. I had never brought any of that to school, and ‘West Side Story’ was my way to do it.” Miranda first crossed paths with



Daveed Diggs, Okieriete Onaodowan, Anthony Ramos, and Lin-Manuel Miranda, in a scene from “Hamilton.”

and tie. “The currency that matters among smart kids is funny, and if you can be funny you are going to be fine, so I got really funny,” he says. (Miranda still calls upon friends and family to fulfill his creative needs. When he and Nadal, who is a corporate lawyer, got married, in 2010, he recruited a corps of wedding guests to surprise her with a choreographed rendition of “To Life,” from “Fiddler on the Roof.” Nearly four million people have watched a video of it on YouTube.)

His parents were aficionados of musicals. “They threw a lot of parties, and the music they played was all Latin music: salsa, El Gran Combo,” he says. “But the clean-up music was always the cast album.” There was not a lot of

touched by the cats when they ran down the aisle. And then I saw ‘Phantom,’ and I was, like, ‘Oh, shit!’ Because it’s about an ugly songwriter who wants to impose his will on the world. I related to that.”

Miranda didn’t study music formally; his piano lessons petered out before he finished elementary school, though he continued to play for pleasure, on a keyboard in his bedroom. But in high school he started performing in musical theatre. As a ninth grader, he was cast as the Pirate King in a production of “The Pirates of Penzance,” beating out a senior who was expected to get the role. “I still remember the applause from that show as my favorite applause I ever got in my life,” he says. As a senior, he di-

Sondheim, who wrote the lyrics to that musical, at Hunter; Sondheim was a friend of another student’s father, who arranged for him to talk to the student cast. “He told the most amazing stories of how the show was created,” Miranda says. “He told us how he had written an opening number and dialogue—he started singing us these lyrics—but Jerome Robbins said, ‘No, I am going to dance all of that.’ It made an enormous impression. It was the first time I had seen how a musical gets created for real.”

In 1997, on his seventeenth birthday, Miranda saw “Rent” on Broadway. He says, “I thought, Oh, I can do that. You are allowed to write musicals about now.” He started writing twenty-minute pieces for the school’s annual theatre

festival. Chris Hayes, the MSNBC broadcaster, was also a Hunter student at the time, and he directed an early work by Miranda called “Nightmare in D Major.” Hayes recalls, “The protagonist’s name was Dylan, and there was a long extended nightmare—some love from his past that was snatched from him, and an evil pig showed up halfway through. There’s a sad ballad, about the forgotten crush, which I can still hum.” Miranda was well aware of his gifts, according to Hayes: “That is part of his power—it gives him a confidence and self-assurance that is part of his charisma. He is not falsely humble. From a distance, I can imagine thinking, Who does that guy think he is? And the answer is, a once-in-a-generational musical talent.”

After graduating from Hunter, Miranda went to Wesleyan, where he surprised one of his high-school productions, a musical called “Seven Minutes in Heaven,” about a seventh grader’s first kiss. “Wesleyan was very similar to Hunter, in that you can find resources for whatever cockamamie idea comes into your head,” he says. In his sophomore year, Miranda moved into La Casa, a Latino cultural center and residence, living there with eight other first-generation students. “This was for real my first time making friends with Latino kids,” he recalls. “It was the first time I could make a joke about Marc Anthony at the same time that I could make a joke about ‘The ThunderCats,’ or some other American bullshit we grew up with. Just like ‘Rent’ gave me permission to write musicals, this gave me permission to write about home.”

In his sophomore year, he wrote a musical set in Washington Heights, conjuring the sound of the neighborhood by drawing on Latin music and hip-hop, neither of which he had ever attempted to compose before. The story line, which featured a tortured love triangle, was shopworn, but when the show was staged, in the spring of 2000, Miranda noticed that every time hip-hop was used to communicate the audience sat up in their seats. “This mix of Latin music and hip-hop was potent—there was something in that groove,” he says.

For the remaining two years of college, Miranda left the musical’s man-

uscript—an early iteration of “In the Heights”—in a drawer. But word of it got out among students interested in theatre. In 2002, Miranda’s senior project, a show called “On Borrowed Time,” was presented at Wesleyan’s Center for the Arts. Thomas Kail, who had graduated from Wesleyan two years earlier and had recently helped launch a theatre company, came to see the show, having admired the script of “In the Heights.” He found “On Borrowed Time” far less interesting, and afterward Kail shook Miranda’s hand and said, patronizingly, “Enjoy this.” (The two still use the phrase on each other several times a week.) A month later, Miranda and Kail met in New York, in the basement of the Drama Book Shop, on West Fortieth Street, and talked for five hours. “I had been thinking about ‘In the Heights’ for two years, and we started a conversation that never stopped,” Kail says.

After Miranda graduated from Wesleyan, his father urged him to go to law school; Luis Miranda pointed to the example of Rubén Blades as a musical talent who had taken the precaution of getting a law degree before pursuing stardom. Instead, Miranda went back to Hunter, as a substitute seventh-grade English teacher. “They did grammar, which we didn’t do when I was a student, so I was kind of learning grammar one lesson ahead of my kids,” he says. At the same time, he was working on “In the Heights”: every few months, he and Kail got together with actors to try out new material, with Miranda taking the role of Usnavi, a bodega owner who serves as a narrator. “We couldn’t find someone to learn all those raps, under an Equity contract, so I kind of fell in the snowball,” he says.

The show eventually drew the attention of several Broadway producers, including Kevin McCollum, who had recently nurtured another new work, called “Avenue Q.” “He was, like, ‘Come back to me when you know what the story is,’” Miranda says. (McCollum became one of the Broadway producers of “Heights.”) In 2004, Miranda and Kail recruited Quiara Alegria Hudes, a young playwright, to rewrite the book. Hudes made radical changes, including eliminating one corner of the love

triangle and placing the focus on Usnavi, the humble yet charismatic anchor of the block. The romance that had driven the narrative became secondary to Miranda’s loving depiction of a neighborhood.

In 2007, after several more workshop productions, the show opened Off Broadway. It moved to Broadway the next year, where it was praised by reviewers for its inventive infectiousness, even if it was also charged with a degree of sentimentality and dramatic incoherence. In the *Times*, Charles Isherwood wrote, “In many ways ‘In the Heights’ suggests an uptown ‘Rent,’ plus some salsa fresca and without the sex, drugs and disease.”

Miranda writes many of his lyrics while in motion: walking around Fort Tryon Park, which is near his apartment, or riding the subway downtown from 181st Street. His iTunes folder is full of musical fragments—“Battle Loop,” “Burr-Hamilton Loop”—that he composed on Logic Pro. “I will write eight or sixteen bars of music I think is exciting, or interesting, or sounds like the pulse of the character I want to be speaking, and then I will go and put on my headphones and walk my dog and talk to myself,” he says. Sometimes when he is working on a riff he sings into the voice-memo function on one device while listening to the loop on another. The refrain of Aaron Burr’s signature song, “Wait for It,” came to him fully formed one evening on the subway. “I was going to a friend’s birthday party in Dumbo,” he says. “I sang the melody into the iPhone, then I went to the guy’s party for fifteen minutes, and wrote the rest of the song on the train back home.”

For a long time, Miranda couldn’t decide whether he wanted to play Hamilton or Burr, who has often been portrayed as one of the villains of early American history. After Hamilton’s death, Burr was accused of conspiring to form an independent nation in the Southwest. (He was eventually acquitted.) Miranda has more sympathy for Burr than many historians do. “I feel an equal affinity with Burr,” he says. “Burr is every bit as smart as Hamilton, and every bit as gifted, and he comes from the same amount of

CHORUS

My real name is Israel Beilin. My father
Was a Roman slave who gained his freedom.
I was first named Ralph Waldo Ellison

but I changed it to the name of one of your cities
Because I was born a Jew in Byelorussia.

I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not.

My other name is Flaccus. I wrote an essay
On the theme, You Choose Your Ancestors.
It won't be any feeble, conventional wings

I'll rise on—not I, born of poor parents.
Look, even now the skin around my ankles

Has been transformed and I am growing wings.

Across the color line I summon Aurelius
And Aristotle: threading through Philistine
And Amalekite they come, quite graciously

And without condescension. I took the name
Irving or Caesar or Creole Jack. Some day

They'll study me in Hungary, and L.A., so

Spare me your needless tribute. Spare me the red
Hideousness of Georgia. I wrote your White
Christmas for you. My third name, Burghardt,

Is Dutch, and for all you know I am related to
Spinoza, Walcott, Pissarro—and in fact my

Grandfather Burghardt's first name was Othello.

—Robert Pinsky

loss as Hamilton. But because of the way they are wired Burr hangs back where Hamilton charges forward. I feel like I have been Burr in my life as many times as I have been Hamilton. I think we've all had moments where we've seen friends and colleagues zoom past us, either to success, or to marriage, or to homeownership, while we lingered where we were—broke, single, jobless. And you tell yourself, 'Wait for it.' Miranda recently turned thirty-five. "I feel very Burr-like when I think what Hamilton accomplished by that age. Or Paul McCartney. Or Sondheim. Or Gersh-

win. Or OutKast. My jaw drops in awe of that kind of work ethic."

In the end, a professional calculus prevailed. "When I get called in for stuff for Hollywood, I get to be the best friend of the Caucasian lead," he says. "If I want to play the main guy, I have found, I have to write it. John Leguizamo would tell you the same thing." (At the Public, Burr is played by Leslie Odom, Jr., who recently starred in the NBC series "Smash.") Playing Hamilton, Miranda says, "I get to be cockier than I really am; I get to be smarter than I really am; I get to be more impulsive than I really am—it's taking the

reins off your id for two and a half hours."

Thomas Kail was not surprised that Miranda ultimately chose to portray Hamilton. He says, "This idea of Hamilton being so conscious of a ticking clock is very much a match for Lin's biochemistry." During rehearsals for the Broadway run of "Heights," Miranda developed the superstition that he would die before opening night. "It was like a running joke: 'Unknown Composer Falls Down Manhole,' 'Unknown Composer Hit by Bus,'" Miranda says. "When I wrote Hamilton's lyric 'I imagine death so much it feels more like a memory,' I was, like, 'O.K., I know this guy.'"

Quiara Hudes, who remains a close friend, compares "Heights" to an autobiographical first novel: "'This is who I am, this is where I come from'—he got that off his chest with an explosive energy." "Hamilton," she suggests, is the first piece Miranda has written entirely as an adult, in which he can powerfully incorporate his multiple identities. "He is Puerto Rico, he is New York, he is hip-hop, he is Broadway—he is all these different worlds," she says. "He has discovered that when you bring all of your spaces into one room it excites people, because that's what this country is."

Miranda's team at the Public prefers that the show not be described as a hip-hop musical—a reasonable objection, given the score's musical variety, but also a strategic one. Such a categorization might limit audience interest, especially on Broadway, where it is hoped that the show will eventually transfer. ("Hamilton" was officially sold out at the Public well before the end of 2014, and its run has already been extended twice.)

Although hip-hop has been a dominant musical genre for more than a generation, it has had little impact on Broadway: other than "In the Heights," which ran for three years, the only significant effort was "Holler if Ya Hear Me," from last year, based on the lyrics of Tupac Shakur, which closed after six weeks. Jeffrey Seller, who was a producer of "Heights," and has contributed a million dollars to the production costs of "Hamilton," says, "No one wants to listen to hip-hop all night, and we are not going to give it to them all night. I did 'Heights,' which ran for three years, and

if it didn't have that label of hip-hop painted on it all the time it would still be running, because it was a beautiful, emotionally satisfying show."

Perceptions about the music aren't the only challenge in promoting "Hamilton." Seller can imagine theatregoers saying, "Who wants to go and see a show about America's first bureaucrat?" Similar problems plagued the 2010 Broadway production of "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson," an emo-rock musical about the seventh President; though it received strong reviews, it closed at a loss, after four months.

Despite Seller's caution, Miranda's ability to make rap and hip-hop seem entirely appropriate to the Revolutionary period has won over viewers who may never have heard of OutKast. John Guare, the playwright, was taken by a friend to the workshop last spring. "I haven't felt this alive in a show since I don't know when," Guare says. "You had that incredible feeling of when a door opens up and a brand-new wind blows through. He had captured the spirit of Hamilton, and the spirit of Ron Chernow's book, and the spirit of the time. It was such an odd thing, but it was done with such elegance and care and control and madness." Miranda's bona fides as a hip-hop freestyler, meanwhile, may attract new audiences. Lemon Andersen, a performance artist based in Brooklyn, says of "Hamilton," "There is going to be a commu-

nity that never goes to theatre showing up to see this. I keep telling everyone from our culture, 'You have no idea how lyrically amazing this show is from a rap perspective.'" The rapper Common, who appeared with Miranda in the Disney movie "The Odd Life of Timothy Green," says, "I will always remember us freestyling during lunchtime on the set and thinking, 'Wow, this guy is talented.'"

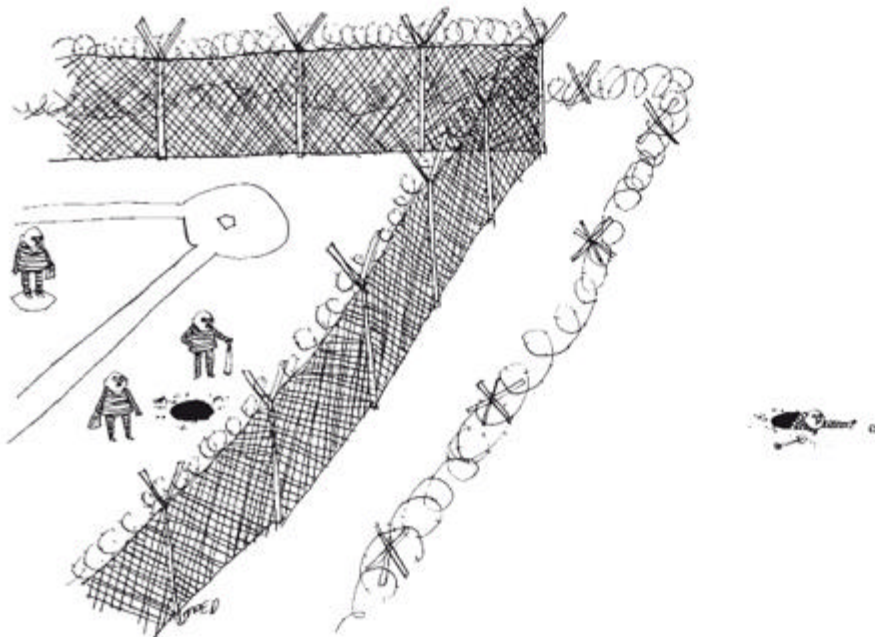
Miranda's show is sung-through, as in most operas, so there is never a sense of a character shifting register into rap. Daveed Diggs, "Hamilton"'s Jefferson, says that, in the America depicted onstage, "this is the only way that people know how to talk to each other." He adds, "It feels important, because it allows us to see ourselves as part of history that we always thought we were excluded from." He adds, "Rap is the voice of the people of our generation, and of people of color, and just the fact that it exists in this piece, and is not commented upon, gives us a sense of ownership." Christopher Jackson, whose dignified George Washington raps commandingly over a grimy, bass-heavy hip-hop beat and ascends to soaring R.&B. ballads, says that the show offers an implicit commentary on the institution of slavery and its repercussions. "The Broadway audience doesn't like to be preached to," he says. "By having a multicultural cast, it gives us, as actors of color, the

chance to provide an additional context just by our presence onstage, filling these characters up."

Rehearsals for "Hamilton" took place in a rented studio space just off Times Square. One afternoon in early December, the cast worked on "My Shot," the propulsive number set on the eve of the Revolution. Almost the entire company was performing, learning the strenuous hip-hop-inflected dances of the show's choreographer, Andy Blankenbuehler. Miranda's music, now fully orchestrated, by Alex Lacamoire—like Blankenbuehler, a veteran of "In the Heights"—built to a delirious crescendo. A young actor, Anthony Ramos, charged with exultant fury across the stage, playing John Laurens, a slave owner's son who was a close friend of Hamilton's. During the Revolution, Laurens proposed to recruit slaves as soldiers, promising them freedom upon victory, and sought to form a black regiment; he was killed in action during one of the war's final battles, in 1782. "Don't this shit make my people wanna rise up!" Ramos chanted, leading an escalating chorus of revolt.

Miranda, who had grown his hair to his shoulders for the role, had a haunted air, his eyes ringed with fatigue—in early November, he and Nadal had their first child, Sebastian. Nevertheless, Miranda shifted energetically between roles: one moment he was swaggering downstage with the ensemble, insolently extending his fingers and thumb above his head, as if he were shooting a gun; the next he was tapping on his computer or his phone. "I have a lot of apps open in my brain right now," he said. "The script, learning choreography, and Twitter. And the news."

That afternoon, in New York, a grand jury announced that it would not indict the police officer Daniel Pantaleo in the death of Eric Garner, the Staten Island man who was choked to death last summer, after being apprehended for selling loose cigarettes. A week earlier, there had been riots in Ferguson, Missouri, after a grand jury there also failed to indict a white policeman, Darren Wilson, in the shooting death of an African-American man, Michael Brown. "We're screaming 'Rise up,' and a lot of people are feeling that way," Miranda said.



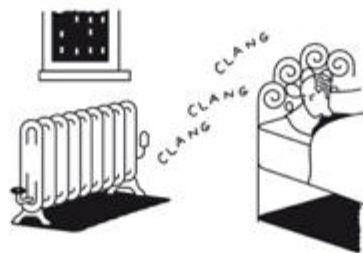
After Miranda's White House performance, in 2009, the party had moved to a reception area in the lobby, where Miranda had discovered a d.j. playing hip-hop. He had felt astonished: America finally had a President who didn't feel like a throwback, who lived in the same world that he did. If the events of the previous weeks had offered painful evidence that this promise of inclusion remained unfulfilled, Miranda still had the power of words to offer. While marchers started assembling on the streets of Manhattan for evening demonstrations, Miranda tweeted Hamilton's lines from "My Shot": "If we win our independence/Is that a guarantee of freedom for our descendants?/Or will the blood we shed begin an endless/Cycle of vengeance and death with no defendants?"

In a quieter rehearsal room that afternoon, Miranda and Jackson worked with Kail on another scene: an early encounter between Washington and Hamilton after the devastating Battle of Brooklyn, in August, 1776. In the song "Right Hand Man," Washington summons Hamilton and informs him that he needs his services more as a secretary than as a soldier: "Head full of fantasies of dying like a martyr?/Dying is easy, young man. Living is harder." Hamilton protests—he wants to be given the command of a battalion.

Kail asked Miranda what he thought was in Hamilton's mind. "I think he's in defensive mode, until he sees Washington open up," Miranda replied. "I am thinking of Al Pacino, in 'The Godfather,' when he hears the train approaching—it's, like, he's going all in, or he's not. Is he going to pop the police chief and Sollozzo, or is he, like, going to have dinner?" Hamilton, Miranda said, had been determined to get the "martyr win," and was always the last to leave the battlefield. Now Hamilton was rapidly calculating the greater impact he might have by being at Washington's side—a calculation that needed to be conveyed within a single bar of music. "Even here, he is saying, 'I'm going to use this to rise,'" Miranda said. "I thought I was going to rise on the battlefield. But I am going to have to do it this way."

Running through the song a few times, Miranda played with the delivery of Hamilton's response to Wash-

ington's proposal: "I am not throwing away my shot." A few songs earlier, that refrain had implied Hamilton's willingness to lose his life in battle; now it signified his recognition of an opportunity to establish a legacy that would outlast him. In the script, Washington interrupts Hamilton with a single word—"son"—capturing his paternal feeling for his young lieutenant. (Chernow writes that Hamilton was falsely rumored to be Washington's illegiti-



mate child.) But in Jackson's delivery "son" also had a hip-hop resonance, implying brotherhood and parity.

Miranda, Jackson, and Kail turned the lines over, looking for the best way to convey Washington's comprehension of Hamilton's new intention—allowing the audience to register Hamilton's sense of himself evolving from soldier to future statesman. Miranda studied the script that he'd written. "I wonder if it's as simple as Washington not saying 'son' but saying 'good,'" he said. "And that 'good' means 'You're hired.' And then Hamilton is unleashed in this new capacity."

Miranda's script was still in draft form. On the page where Hamilton's death in the duel was to be depicted, there was a placeholder sentence: "New Song Under Construction Here." A few weeks later, Miranda was still struggling with the passage. "What was going on in Hamilton's head in those final moments?" he said. "I am going to be making that guess until Tommy forces me to put my pen down." He went on, "There is this man, Burr, he has known since being a teen-ager, and his thoughts on that. There is his wife, who he knows he is leaving behind with many children, and in debt, and the guilt over that. But he was a Christian, and so there is also a son that he is going to get to see again; John Laurens he is going to get to see again; George Washington he is going to get to see again. There are plenty of people he loves pull-

ing him to the other side. And so I'm exploring how much of that we have time for, in the time that it takes the bullet to leave the gun."

The solution came to Miranda at almost the last moment, early in the morning on New Year's Day. He was lying in bed, with his infant son sleeping on his chest, and Nadal sleeping next to him. It was the quietest Miranda could remember his life being for a long time. Quiet, he thought. That was the one card he hadn't yet played in "Hamilton." What if he didn't write any music at all? He took his dog out for a walk, leaving his headphones at home this time, occasionally stopping to scribble in a notebook. He stayed up working until five the next morning, hearing Hamilton's final moments at last.

Previews began three weeks later at the Public Theatre. In the lobby stood a pair of bronze statues borrowed from the New-York Historical Society, showing Burr and Hamilton facing off, pistols drawn. Onstage, Miranda's cast was getting comfortable wearing unfamiliar costumes, and enjoying the receptivity of an audience. There was laughter at the prideful reprimands of a bejewelled King George, and delighted recognition of the Biggie homage in "Duel Commandments." Cheers followed the interwoven musical themes that end the first act, in the shamelessly rousing manner of "One Day More," from "Les Misérables." The harrowing death of Philip, Hamilton's cherished son, elicited tears.

After two and a half hours of surging music, it was time for the Burr-Hamilton duel. When Burr fired his fatal shot, and Hamilton recognized that his long-anticipated death had arrived, the music dropped away. Miranda, dressed in black mourning clothes, delivered not a rap but what sounded like a poem; Hamilton's last flickers of thought and emotion were no longer tethered to a beat or a melody. "I wrote some notes for the beginning of a song someone will sing for me/America you great unfinished symphony/You sent for me," he said, quietly. Hamilton remembered his wife and friends, snatching at lyrical scraps from earlier songs as his coherence dissipated, the words forming a fractured, evanescent reprise, until he faltered and fell into silence. ♦



Sweetness
TONI MORRISON

It's not my fault. So you can't blame me. I didn't do it and have no idea how it happened. It didn't take more than an hour after they pulled her out from between my legs for me to realize something was wrong. Really wrong. She was so black she scared me. Midnight black, Sudanese black. I'm light-skinned, with good hair, what we call high yellow, and so is Lula Ann's father. Ain't nobody in my family anywhere near that color. Tar is the closest I can think of, yet her hair don't go with the skin. It's different—straight but curly, like the hair on those naked tribes in Australia. You might think she's a throwback, but a throwback to what? You should've seen my grandmother; she passed for white, married a white man, and never said another word to any one of her children. Any letter she got from my mother or my aunts she sent right back, unopened. Finally they got the message of no message and let her be. Almost all mulatto types and quadroons did that back in the day—if they had the right kind of hair, that is. Can you imagine how many white folks have Negro blood hiding in their veins? Guess. Twenty per cent, I heard. My own mother, Lula Mae, could have passed easy, but she chose not to. She told me the price she paid for that decision. When she and my father went to the courthouse to get married, there were two Bibles, and they had to put their hands on the one reserved for Negroes. The other one was for white people's hands. The Bible! Can you beat it? My mother was a housekeeper for a rich white couple. They ate every meal she cooked and insisted she scrub their backs while they sat in the tub, and God knows what other intimate things they made her do, but no touching of the same Bible.

Some of you probably think it's a bad thing to group ourselves according to skin color—the lighter the better—in social clubs, neighborhoods, churches, sororities, even colored schools. But how else can we hold on to a little dignity? How else can we avoid being spit on in a drugstore, elbowed at the bus stop, having to walk in the gutter to let whites have the whole sidewalk, being charged a nickel

at the grocer's for a paper bag that's free to white shoppers? Let alone all the name-calling. I heard about all of that and much, much more. But because of my mother's skin color she wasn't stopped from trying on hats or using the ladies' room in the department stores. And my father could try on shoes in the front part of the shoe store, not in a back room. Neither one of them would let themselves drink from a "Colored Only" fountain, even if they were dying of thirst.

I hate to say it, but from the very beginning in the maternity ward the baby, Lula Ann, embarrassed me. Her birth skin was pale like all babies', even African ones, but it changed fast. I thought I was going crazy when she turned blue-black right before my eyes. I know I went crazy for a minute, because—just for a few seconds—I held a blanket over her face and pressed. But I couldn't do that, no matter how much I wished she hadn't been born with that terrible color. I even thought of giving her away to an orphanage someplace. But I was scared to be one of those mothers who leave their babies on church steps. Recently, I heard about a couple in Germany, white as snow, who had a dark-skinned baby nobody could explain. Twins, I believe—one white, one colored. But I don't know if it's true. All I know is that, for me, nursing her was like having a pickaninny sucking my teat. I went to bottle-feeding soon as I got home.

My husband, Louis, is a porter, and when he got back off the rails he looked at me like I really was crazy and looked at the baby like she was from the planet Jupiter. He wasn't a cussing man, so when he said, "God damn! What the hell is this?" I knew we were in trouble. That was what did it—what caused the fights between me and him. It broke our marriage to pieces. We had three good years together, but when she was born he blamed me and treated Lula Ann like she was a stranger—more than that, an enemy. He never touched her.

I never did convince him that I ain't never, ever fooled around with another man. He was dead sure I was lying. We argued and argued till I told him her blackness had to be from his

own family—not mine. That was when it got worse, so bad he just up and left and I had to look for another, cheaper place to live. I did the best I could. I knew enough not to take her with me when I applied to landlords, so I left her with a teen-age cousin to babysit. I didn't take her outside much, anyway, because, when I pushed her in the baby carriage, people would lean down and peek in to say something nice and then give a start or jump back before frowning. That hurt. I could have been the babysitter if our skin colors were reversed. It was hard enough just being a colored woman—even a high-yellow one—trying to rent in a decent part of the city. Back in the nineties, when Lula Ann was born, the law was against discriminating in who you could rent to, but not many landlords paid attention to it. They made up reasons to keep you out. But I got lucky with Mr. Leigh, though I know he upped the rent seven dollars from what he'd advertised, and he had a fit if you were a minute late with the money.

I told her to call me "Sweetness" instead of "Mother" or "Mama." It was safer. Her being that black and having what I think are too thick lips and calling me "Mama" would've confused people. Besides, she has funny-colored eyes, crow black with a blue tint—something witchy about them, too.

So it was just us two for a long while, and I don't have to tell you how hard it is being an abandoned wife. I guess Louis felt a little bit bad after leaving us like that, because a few months later on he found out where I'd moved to and started sending me money once a month, though I never asked him to and didn't go to court to get it. His fifty-dollar money orders and my night job at the hospital got me and Lula Ann off welfare. Which was a good thing. I wish they would stop calling it welfare and go back to the word they used when my mother was a girl. Then it was called "relief." Sounds much better, like it's just a short-term breather while you get yourself together. Besides, those welfare clerks are mean as spit. When finally I got work and didn't need them anymore, I was making more money



than they ever did. I guess meanness filled out their skimpy paychecks, which was why they treated us like beggars. Especially when they looked at Lula Ann and then back at me—like I was trying to cheat or something. Things got better but I still had to be careful. Very careful in how I raised her. I had to be strict, very strict. Lula Ann needed to learn how to behave, how to keep her head down and not to make trouble. I don't care how many times she changes her name. Her color is a cross she will always carry. But it's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not.

Oh, yeah, I feel bad sometimes about how I treated Lula Ann when she was little. But you have to understand: I had to protect her. She didn't know the world. With that skin, there was no point in being tough or sassy, even when you were right. Not in a world where you could be sent to a juvenile lockup for talking back or fighting in school, a world where you'd be the last one hired and the first one

fired. She didn't know any of that or how her black skin would scare white people or make them laugh and try to trick her. I once saw a girl nowhere near as dark as Lula Ann who couldn't have been more than ten years old tripped by one of a group of white boys and when she tried to scramble up another one put his foot on her behind and knocked her flat again. Those boys held their stomachs and bent over with laughter. Long after she got away, they were still giggling, so proud of themselves. If I hadn't been watching through the bus window I would have helped her, pulled her away from that white trash. See, if I hadn't trained Lula Ann properly she wouldn't have known to always cross the street and avoid white boys. But the lessons I taught her paid off, and in the end she made me proud as a peacock.

I wasn't a bad mother, you have to know that, but I may have done some hurtful things to my only child because I had to protect her. Had to. All because of skin privileges. At first I

couldn't see past all that black to know who she was and just plain love her. But I do. I really do. I think she understands now. I think so.

Last two times I saw her she was, well, striking. Kind of bold and confident. Each time she came to see me, I forgot just how black she really was because she was using it to her advantage in beautiful white clothes.

Taught me a lesson I should have known all along. What you do to children matters. And they might never forget. As soon as she could, she left me all alone in that awful apartment. She got as far away from me as she could: dolled herself up and got a big-time job in California. She don't call or visit anymore. She sends me money and stuff every now and then, but I ain't seen her in I don't know how long.

I prefer this place—Winston House—to those big, expensive nursing homes outside the city. Mine is small, homey, cheaper, with twenty-four-hour nurses and a doctor who comes twice a week. I'm only sixty-three—too young for pasture—but I came down with some creeping bone disease, so good care is vital. The boredom is worse than the weakness or the pain, but the nurses are lovely. One just kissed me on the cheek when I told her I was going to be a grandmother. Her smile and her compliments were fit for someone about to be crowned. I showed her the note on blue paper that I got from Lula Ann—well, she signed it “Bride,” but I never pay that any attention. Her words sounded giddy. “Guess what, S. I am so, so happy to pass along this news. I am going to have a baby. I'm too, too thrilled and hope you are, too.” I reckon the thrill is about the baby, not its father, because she doesn't mention him at all. I wonder if he is as black as she is. If so, she needn't worry like I did. Things have changed a mite from when I was young. Blue-blacks are all over TV, in fashion magazines, commercials, even starring in movies.

There is no return address on the envelope. So I guess I'm still the bad parent being punished forever till the

day I die for the well-intended and, in fact, necessary way I brought her up. I know she hates me. Our relationship is down to her sending me money. I have to say I'm grateful for the cash, because I don't have to beg for extras, like some of the other patients. If I want my own fresh deck of cards for solitaire, I can get it and not need to play with the dirty, worn one in the lounge. And I can buy my special face cream. But I'm not fooled. I know the money she sends is a way to stay away and quiet down the little bit of conscience she's got left.

If I sound irritable, ungrateful, part of it is because underneath is regret. All the little things I didn't do or did wrong. I remember when she had her first period and how I reacted. Or the times I shouted when she stumbled or dropped something. True. I was really upset, even repelled by her black skin when she was born and at first I thought of . . . No. I have to push those memories away—fast. No point. I know I did the best for her under the circumstances. When my husband ran out on us, Lula Ann was a burden. A heavy one, but I bore it well.

Yes, I was tough on her. You bet I was. By the time she turned twelve going on thirteen, I had to be even tougher. She was talking back, refusing to eat what I cooked, primping her hair. When I braided it, she'd go to school and unbraid it. I couldn't let her go bad. I slammed the lid and warned her about the names she'd be called. Still, some of my schooling must have rubbed off. See how she turned out? A rich career girl. Can you beat it?

Now she's pregnant. Good move, Lula Ann. If you think mothering is all cooing, booties, and diapers you're in for a big shock. Big. You and your nameless boyfriend, husband, pickup—whoever—imagine, *Oooh! A baby! Kitchee kitchee koo!*

Listen to me. You are about to find out what it takes, how the world is, how it works, and how it changes when you are a parent.

Good luck, and God help the child. ♦

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THE CRITICS



BOOKS

DON'T BE LIKE THAT

Does black culture need to be reformed?

BY KELEFA SANNEH

It was just after eight o'clock on a November night when Robert McCulloch, the prosecuting attorney for St. Louis County, announced that a grand jury would not be returning an indictment in the police killing of Michael Brown, who was eighteen, unarmed, and African-American. About an hour later and eight hundred miles away, President Obama delivered a short and sober speech designed to function as an anti-inflammatory. He praised police officers while urging them to "show care and restraint" when confronting protesters. He said that "communities of color" had "real issues" with law enforcement, but reminded disappointed Missourians that Brown's mother and father had asked for peace. "Michael Brown's parents have lost more than anyone," he said. "We should be honoring their wishes."

Even as he mentioned Brown's parents, Obama was careful not to invoke Brown himself, who had become a polarizing figure. To the protesters who chanted, "Hands up! Don't shoot!," Brown was a symbol of the young African-American man as victim—the chant referred to the claim that Brown was surrendering, with his hands up, when he was killed. Critics of the protest movement were more likely to bring up the video, taken in the fifteen minutes before Brown's death, that appeared to show him stealing cigarillos from a convenience store and then shoving and intimidating the worker who tried to stop him—the vic-

tim was also, it seemed, a perpetrator.

After the *Times* described Brown as "no angel," the MSNBC host Melissa Harris-Perry accused the newspaper of "victim-blaming," arguing that African-Americans, no matter how "angelic," will never be safe from "those who see their very skin as a sin." But, on the *National Review* Web site, Heather MacDonald quoted an anonymous black corporate executive who told her, "Michael Brown may have been shot by the cop, but he was killed by parents and a community that produced such a thug." And so the Michael Brown debate became a proxy for our ongoing argument about race: where some seek to expose what America is doing to black communities, others insist that the real problem is what black communities are doing to themselves.

Sociologists who study black America have a name for these camps: those who emphasize the role of institutional racism and economic circumstances are known as structuralists, while those who emphasize the importance of self-perpetuating norms and behaviors are known as culturalists. Mainstream politicians are culturalists by nature, because in America you seldom lose an election by talking up the virtues of hard work and good conduct. But in many sociology departments structuralism holds sway—no one who studies African-American communities wants to be accused, as the *Times* was, of "victim-blaming." Orlando Patterson, a

Jamaica-born sociologist at Harvard with an appetite for intellectual combat, wants to redeem the culturalist tradition, thereby redeeming sociology itself. In a manifesto published in December, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, he argued that "fearful" sociologists had abandoned "studies of the cultural dimensions of poverty, particularly black poverty," and that the discipline had become "largely irrelevant." Now Patterson and Ethan Fosse, a Harvard doctoral student in sociology, are publishing an ambitious new anthology called "The Cultural Matrix: Understanding Black Youth" (Harvard), which is meant to show that the culturalist tradition still has something to teach us.

The book arrives on the fiftieth anniversary of its most important predecessor: a slim government report written by an Assistant Secretary of Labor and first printed in an edition of a hundred. The author was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and the title was "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action." At first, the historian James T. Patterson has written, only one copy was allowed to circulate; the other ninety-nine were locked in a vault. Moynihan's report cited sociologists and government surveys to underscore a message meant to startle: the Negro community was doing badly, and its condition was probably "getting worse, not better." Moynihan, who was trained in sociology, judged that "most Negro youth are in danger of being caught up in the tangle of pathology that affects their world, and probably a majority are so entrapped." He returned again and again to his main theme, "the deterioration of the Negro family," which he considered "the fundamental source of the weakness of the Negro community"; he included a chart showing the rising proportion of non-white births in America that were "illegitimate." (The report used the terms "Negro" and "nonwhite" interchangeably.) And, at the end, Moynihan called—briefly, and vaguely—for a national program to "strengthen the Negro family."

The 1965 report was leaked to the press, inspiring a series of lurid articles, and later that year the Johnson Administration released the entire document, making it available for forty-five cents. Moynihan found some allies, including

ABOVE: FRANÇOIS AVRIL



Orlando Patterson thinks that sociologists have made themselves irrelevant by refusing to tackle black culture.



"I suggest the 5-iron, but, then again, you're not playing golf, and I'm not your caddie, and I can see you're about to call security."

Martin Luther King, Jr. In a speech in October, King referred to an unnamed "recent study" showing that "the Negro family in the urban ghettos is crumbling and disintegrating." But King also worried that some people might attribute this "social catastrophe" to "innate Negro weaknesses," and that discussions of it could be "used to justify neglect and rationalize oppression." Many sociologists were harsher. Andrew Billingsley argued that in assessing the problems caused by dysfunctional black families Moynihan had mistaken the symptom for the sickness. "The family is a creature of society," he wrote. "And the greatest problems facing black families are problems which emanate from the white racist, militarist, materialistic society which places higher priority on putting white men on the moon than putting black men on their feet on this earth." This debate had influence far beyond sociological journals: when Harris-Perry accused the *Times* of "victim-blaming," she was using a term coined by the psychologist William Ryan, in a book-length

rebuttal to the Moynihan report, "Blaming the Victim."

Orlando Patterson thinks that, half a century later, it's easier to appreciate all that Moynihan got right. "History has been kind to Moynihan," he and Fosse write, which might be another way of saying that history has not been particularly kind to the people Moynihan wrote about—some of his dire predictions no longer seem so outlandish. Moynihan despaired that the illegitimacy rate for Negro babies was approaching twenty-five per cent. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the equivalent rate in 2013 was 71.5 per cent. (The rate for non-Hispanic white babies was 29.3 per cent.) Even so, Patterson and the other contributors avoid pronouncing upon "ghetto culture" or "the culture of poverty," or even "black culture." Instead, the authors see shifting patterns of belief and behavior that may nevertheless combine to make certain families less stable, or certain young people less employable. The hope is that, by paying close attention to culture,

sociologists will be better equipped to identify these patterns, and help change them.

In Moynihan's view, the triumph of the civil-rights movement made his report that much more exigent: he was sure that as long as the Negro family was unstable the movement's promises of economic advancement and social equality would remain unfulfilled. Of course, alarming reports about the state of black culture have a long history in America: sometimes the accounts of deviant behavior were meant to explain why black oppression was justified; at other times, the accounts were meant to explain why black oppression was harmful.

In 1899, the trailblazing Negro scholar W. E. B. Du Bois drew on interviews and census data to produce "The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study," which helped shape the young discipline of sociology. Du Bois spent a year living in the neighborhood he wrote about, amid what he later described as "an atmosphere of dirt, drunkenness, poverty, and crime." What emerged from this field research was a stern, unsentimental book; at times, Du Bois's disdain for his subjects, especially what he called "the dregs," seemed as great as his outrage at the discrimination they faced. He observed, in language much harsher than Moynihan's, the large number of unmarried mothers, many of whom he characterized as "ignorant and loose." In this book, as in the rest of his life, Du Bois did not shy away from prescription. He concluded by reminding whites of their duty to stop employment discrimination, which he called "morally wrong, politically dangerous, industrially wasteful, and socially silly." But he reminded Negro readers that they had a duty, too: to work harder, to behave better, and to stem the tide of "Negro crime," which was, he said, "a menace to a civilized people." His chapter on "The Negro Criminal," illustrated with charts and graphs, showed that Negroes were disproportionately represented in police records—though he suggested that the police, too, were acting disproportionately.

In the years before Moynihan, other social scientists refined Du Bois's approach, most famously Oscar Lewis,

who used the term “culture of poverty” to describe what he saw among the Mexican families he studied. In retrospect, it seems clear that what infuriated many of Moynihan’s readers wasn’t so much what he wrote (he was mainly summarizing contemporary research) as what he represented. He was a young white political staffer explaining what was wrong with black communities, so he had to be wrong, even if he was right. One of the most revealing and representative responses came from James Farmer, the director of the Congress of Racial Equality: “We are sick unto death of being analyzed, mesmerized, bought, sold, and slobbered over, while the same evils that are the ingredients of our oppression go unattended.” Moynihan had stumbled into a quandary familiar to sociologists: sometimes your subject doesn’t want to be subjectified.

The battle over Moynihan’s report was a battle over the legacy of slavery, too, and Orlando Patterson was well

qualified to join it. He earned his Ph.D. in 1965, with a dissertation on the sociology of Jamaican slavery, and in his best-known books, “Slavery and Social Death” and “Freedom in the Making of Western Culture,” he broadened his focus to consider the institution of slavery and how it gave rise to the ideal of freedom. (He has also published a trio of novels set in Jamaica.) In 1973, as the anti-Moynihan wave was cresting, Patterson offered a partial defense: rebutting Ryan’s rebuttal, he wrote that writers like Moynihan “in no way blame the victim.” In fact, Patterson argued, Moynihan’s report was overly “deterministic,” portraying black Americans as the inevitable victims of a long and oppressive history. Even more than Du Bois, Moynihan stressed the debilitating legacy of American slavery, asserting that it was “indescribably worse” than any form of bondage in the history of the world. Although Moynihan’s fiercest critics didn’t dispute this, they found themselves argu-

ing that slavery had been less destructive than Moynihan thought: they celebrated the resilience of the black family in its non-standard forms. (Moynihan’s “illegitimacy” statistics couldn’t account for the grandparents and other extended-family members who might help a mother bring up her child.) Patterson called these scholars “survivalists,” in contrast to “catastrophists,” and years later the survivalists’ work can seem too transparent in its aims. A number of sociologists, wary of insulting their subjects, seemed content to settle for flattery instead, depicting the black family as an extraordinary success story, no matter what the statistics said.

Patterson sometimes implies that the Moynihan affair chastened sociology forever, but the culturalist impulse didn’t go away. In 1978, William Julius Wilson popularized the term “underclass,” to describe the non-working poor who have been left behind by the disappearance of blue-collar

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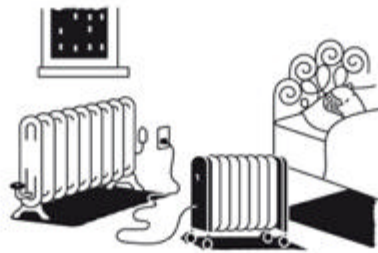
EDUCATION

jobs, but he also came to believe that “social isolation” helps create ways of living that perpetuate poverty. (Wilson argued that declining professional prospects made some black men less marriageable. Patterson thinks that declining marriage rates had more to do with the increased availability of contraception and abortion, which eroded cultural norms that had once compelled men to marry the women they impregnated.) And in 1999, on the hundredth anniversary of Du Bois’s classic, Elijah Anderson published a new sociological study of poor black neighborhoods in Philadelphia, “Code of the Street,” which took seriously its informants’ own characterization of themselves and their neighbors as either “decent” or “street” or, not infrequently, a bit of both. In “The Cultural Matrix,” Patterson updates and expands Anderson’s taxonomy, listing “three main social groups” (the middle class, the working class, and “disconnected street people”) that are common in “disadvantaged” African-American neighborhoods, along with “four focal cultural configurations” (adapted mainstream, proletarian, street, and hip-hop). In general, though, “black youth” means “poor black youth,” since poverty is what gives a project such as this one its urgency.

The contributors to “The Cultural Matrix” strive to avoid technical language, in what seems to be a brave but doomed attempt to attract casual readers to a book that is nearly seven hundred pages long. Some of the best cultural sociology draws its power from careful interviewing and observation. Anderson’s “Code of the Street” was influential because it was widely read, and it was widely read because it often resembled a novel, full of complicated people and pungent testimonials. (One “decent” woman’s account of raising five children had a nine-word opening sentence that no writing workshop could have improved: “My son that’s bad now—his name is Curtis.”) Some of Patterson’s contributors have a similar facility with anecdote. A chapter about resisting the influence of poor neighborhoods includes a startling detail about a tough but crime-averse young man named Gary: “He pats peo-

ple down before they get in his car to make sure they are not carrying anything that could get him arrested.” This, apparently, is what staying out of trouble might entail for a young black man in Baltimore.

Among the most important essays in the new anthology is Jody Miller’s account of sexual relationships in St. Louis. An eighteen-year-old informant named Terence talks about par-



ticipating in a sexual encounter that may not have been consensual, and his affectless language only makes the scene more discomfiting:

INTERVIEWER: Did you know the girl?

TERENCE: Naw, I ain’t know her, know her like for real know her. But I knew her name or whatever. I had seen her before. That was it though.

INTERVIEWER: So when you all got there, she was in the room already?

TERENCE: Naw, when we got there, she hadn’t even got there yet. And when she came, she went in the room with my friend, the one she had already knew. And then after they was in there for a minute, he came out and let us know that she was gon’, you know, run a train or whatever. So after that, we just went one by one.

Miller knows that most readers will find this appalling, so she follows Terence’s testimony with an assurance that incidents such as these reflect a legacy of racism—she mentions, for instance, “the gross ‘scientific’ objectification of African women in the nineteenth century.” This is a common technique among the new culturalists: every distressing contemporary phenomenon must be matched to an explicitly racist antecedent, however distant. This distance is what separates the culturalists from the structuralists. Patterson and the others are right that cultural traits often outgrow and outlive the circumstances of their creation. But often what remains is a circular explanation, description masquerading as a causal account. African-American gender relations are troubled because of

“cultural features” that foster troubled gender relations.

One difference between the current era and Moynihan’s, or Du Bois’s, is that contemporary sociologists have a new potential culprit to blame for the disorder they see: hip-hop. The anthology includes a careful history of the genre by Wayne Marshall, an ethnomusicologist, who emphasizes its mutability. But Patterson, brave as ever, can’t resist wading into this culture war. In one exuberant passage, he compares MC Hammer to Nietzsche, uses an obscure remix verse to contend that hip-hop routinely celebrates “forced abortions,” and pronounces Lil Wayne “irredeemably vulgar” and “all too typical” of the genre’s devolution. And yet he is a conscientious enough social scientist to concede that there doesn’t seem to be decisive evidence for a “causal link” between violent lyrics and violent behavior. Writing in 1999, Anderson mentioned hip-hop only in passing, suggesting that it supported, and was supported by, “an ideology of alienation.” (He was nearly as critical of “popular love songs” and “television soap operas,” which he judged to nourish girls’ dreams of storybook romance. “When a girl is approached by a boy,” he wrote, “her faith in the dream clouds her view of the situation.”) Now hip-hop has achieved cultural hegemony, but Patterson doesn’t seem to have noticed that the genre has become markedly less pugnacious in recent years, thanks to non-thuggish stars like Drake, Nicki Minaj, Macklemore, Kendrick Lamar, and Iggy Azalea. The next wave of culturalist analyses will surely be able to explain how this music, too, is part of the problem.

The most provocative chapter in “The Cultural Matrix” is the final one, an exacting polemic by a Harvard colleague of Patterson’s, Tommie Shelby, a professor of African and African-American studies and of philosophy. Shelby accepts, for the sake of argument, the idea that “suboptimal cultural traits” are the major impediment for many African-Americans seeking to escape poverty. He notes, in language much more delicate than Moynihan’s (let alone Du Bois’s), that “some in ghetto communities are believed to devalue traditional

coparenting and to eschew mainstream styles of childrearing.” Still, Shelby is suspicious of attempts to reform these traits, and not only because he is wary of “victim-blaming.” He thinks that the “ghetto poor” have a right to remain defiantly unaltered. In his view, a program of compulsory cultural reform “robs the ghetto poor of a choice that should be theirs alone—namely, whether the improved prospects for ending or ameliorating ghetto poverty are worth the loss of moral pride they would incur by conceding the insulting view that they have not shown themselves to be deserving of better treatment.” For Shelby, opposing hypothetical future government programs is also a way of registering frustration with past government action, and inaction. “Given its failure to secure just social conditions,” he writes, “the state lacks the moral standing to act as an agent of moral reform.”

This “moral standing” argument is too powerful for its own good, because it would invalidate just about everything done by the U.S. government, or any other. The crucial question is not whether the state has the “moral standing” to reform cultural practices in the ghetto but whether it has the ability. Politicians love to call for such reform; Obama could have been channelling Moynihan when he said, in his famous 2008 speech on race, that African-Americans needed to take more responsibility for their own communities by “demanding more from our fathers.” But a demand is not a program. Patterson, in the essay for the *Chronicle*, suggested that “cultural values, norms, beliefs, and habitual practices may be easier to change than structural ones.” And yet a chapter in the anthology, about a federal relationship-counselling program called Building Strong Families, provides less reason for confidence. In most cases, the follow-up reports suggested that the program had little or no effect on the relationships it sought to help; in one city, Baltimore, couples who received counselling were markedly more likely to split. (The authors, looking for good news, voice a faint hope that the demise of those relationships “may lead to better repartnering outcomes.”)

A few years ago, in *The Nation*, Pat-

erson responded to some disappointing statistics showing high unemployment and persistent segregation by urging African-Americans to “do some serious soul-searching.” But part of the problem with calls for cultural reform is that the so-called “ghetto poor” tend to agree with the kinds of messages that outsiders, whether tough-love politicians or self-conscious sociologists alike, would urge upon them: work matters, family matters, culture matters. Ethan Fosse draws on a number of recent surveys of the “disconnected”—the term refers to young people who are neither employed nor attending school—and finds that they adhere more strongly to various mainstream cultural values than their connected counterparts do: they are more likely to say that having a good career is “very important” to them, and seventy-four per cent of them say that black men “don’t take their education seriously enough,” compared with only sixty-two per cent of connected black youth. Surveys also suggest that disconnected young people are more likely to agree with Patterson’s critique of hip-hop—the people most susceptible to the genre’s influence turn out to be the ones most skeptical of it. In an overview chapter, Patterson wryly notes that results such as these may pose a conundrum. “Sociologists love subjects who tell truth to mainstream power,” he writes. “They grow uncomfortable when these subjects tell mainstream truths to sociologists.” But none of this offers encouragement for people who think that cultural change is a key to social uplift.

Just how dire is the situation? Moynihan worried that “the Negro community” was in a state of decline, bedevilled by an increasingly matriarchal family structure, which led to the increasing incidence of crime and delinquency. Much of Moynihan’s historical data was scant or inconclusive, but, when it came to violent crime, he guessed correctly: in the fifteen years after he published his report, the country’s homicide rate doubled, with blacks overrepresented among both perpetrators and victims. America, and Negro America in particular, was at the beginning of a years-long catastrophe. But what happened next was even more surprising: beginning in the early nineteen-nineties, the homicide rate, like

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other rates of violent crime, began to decline; today, African-Americans are about half as likely to be involved in a homicide, either as perpetrator or as victim, as they were two decades ago. Patterson and Fosse write that, in the years after Moynihan's report, a "discrepancy" developed between the optimistic scholarship of sociologists, eager to emphasize the resilience of black families, and "the reality of urban black life," which was increasingly grim. But the contemporary era has been marked by the opposite discrepancy: even as the new culturalists were resurrecting Moynihan's diagnosis, the scourge of crime was in retreat.

Patterson, committed to his critique of African-American cultural life, can't bring himself to celebrate this news. Hip-hop is important to him because it fuels his suspicion that, despite the drop in crime, black culture is in trouble. Fosse seems to share this pessimism, reporting "an alarming increase in the percentage of black youth who are structurally disconnected over the past decade." He uses survey data to create a fitted curve, showing that "nearly 25 percent" of black youth were disconnected in 2012, while the white rate "has remained below 15 percent." (The curve is not included in the book.) In fact, the data suggest that percentages of disconnection among black and white youth have been rising at about the same rate over the past decade; what's most alarming is not the recent increase but the ongoing disparity. Among Patterson, Fosse, and their peers, the tendency to write as if black culture were in

exceptional crisis seems to be what a sociologist might call an unexamined injunctive norm: a shared prescriptive rule, one so ingrained that its followers don't even realize it exists.

And so the good news on crime gets downplayed. "By focusing too much on the sharp oscillation period between the eighties and late nineties," Patterson writes, "social scientists working on crime run the risk of neglecting the historic pattern of high crime rates among blacks." But this hardly justifies the fact that these sociologists, otherwise so concerned with the effects of crime and the criminal-justice system, aren't more interested in this extraordinary rise and fall, which defied Moynihan's suggestion that crime and "illegitimacy" were inextricably linked. Apparently, this great oscillation neither required nor induced any great changes in black culture, and it has inspired nothing like a consensus among criminologists looking for a cause. Fine-grained cultural trends and well-meaning cultural initiatives often seem insignificant compared with the mysterious forces that can stealthily double or halve the violent-crime rate in the course of a decade or two. A chapter on "street violence" mentions the homicide drop only in passing, in its final paragraph.

In our political debates, as in cultural sociology, it can take some time for the stories to catch up to the statistics, especially because it takes a while to decipher what the statistics are saying. There is some evidence that, after years

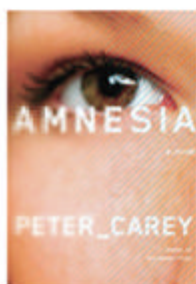
of rapid expansion, the African-American prison population levelled off, and may even have begun to decrease. But that hasn't made the recent arguments over race and the criminal-justice system any less urgent. The outrage in Missouri was followed, a week later, by outrage in New York, when a Staten Island grand jury declined to indict a white police officer who caused the death of an unarmed African-American man. In the aftermath, as some other commentators talked about America's legacy of racism, Patterson dissented. In a *Slate* interview, he said, "I am not in favor of a national conversation on race." He said that most white people in America had come to accept racial equality, but added that "there's a hard core of about twenty per cent which still remains thoroughly racist." The startling implication is that, even now, blacks in America live alongside an equal number of "thoroughly racist" whites. If this is true, it may explain the tragic sensibility that haunts Patterson's avowedly optimistic approach to race in America. He contends that black culture can and must change while conceding, less loudly, that "thoroughly racist" whites are likely to remain stubbornly the same.

There is a paradox at the heart of cultural sociology, which both seeks to explain behavior in broad, categorical terms and promises to respect its subjects' autonomy and intelligence. The results can be deflating, as the researchers find that their subjects are not stupid or crazy or heroic or transcendent—their cultural traditions just don't seem peculiar enough to answer the questions that motivate the research. Black cultural sociology has always been a project of comparison: the idea is not simply to understand black culture but to understand how it differs from white culture, as part of the broader push to reduce racial disparities that have changed surprisingly little since Du Bois's time. Fifty years after Moynihan's report, it's easy to understand why he was concerned. Even so, it's getting easier, too, to sympathize with his detractors, who couldn't understand why he thought new trends might explain old problems. If we want to learn more about black culture, we should study it. But, if we seek to answer the question of racial inequality in America, black culture won't tell us what we want to know. ♦

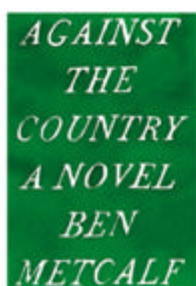


"The thing is, I've grown and you haven't."

BRIEFLY NOTED



AMNESIA, by Peter Carey (*Knopf*). Nestled inside this brisk cyber caper is an aesthetically daring character study. The story is narrated initially by an embattled left-wing journalist who has been promised exclusive access to a young woman accused of hacking into Australia's prison system and freeing inmates across the country. While the book begins as a thriller—the journalist maintains an uncertain alliance with a beautiful actress and contends with the historical consequences of American meddling in international affairs—it later shifts registers and perceptively recounts the formative years of the hacker. Carey imbues her immersion in the world of coding and the Internet with a palpable, engrossing sense of joy and discovery.



AGAINST THE COUNTRY, by Ben Metcalf (*Random House*). Not so much a novel as a litany of complaints from an unknown narrator, who has been dragged from the relative comforts of a town in southern Illinois to rural Virginia, this articulate book neatly skewers the romantic idea of a pastoral life style as a simpler, purer one. The title is literal: the narrator repeatedly makes the case that urban or suburban life is vastly preferable to the bleak deprivations of the country: "Despite all protestations to the contrary, God does not wait for us out in those trees." Metcalf's prose is intoxicatingly ornery, though frustratingly unmoored from any plot. He concludes, "Better to hate at the end of a book, I say, than to love."



IN THESE TIMES, by Jenny Uglow (*Farrar, Straus & Giroux*). This ambitious history of the British home front during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars draws on hundreds of personal accounts. It encompasses Walter Scott's Romantic odes about Highland infantrymen, the run on banks sparked by the Pembrokeshire landings, the wedding night of the future George IV (he "fell into the bedroom fireplace drunk"), and the rations given to wheat-farm laborers in 1795 (two pints' worth of oatmeal, milk, and cheese). In lesser hands, the approach might feel haphazard, but Uglow's deep knowledge of the period reveals certain binding themes. In the political polarization between reformers and loyalists, republicans and monarchists, one sees the emergence of a recognizably modern Britain.



DARK MIRROR, by Sara Lipton (*Metropolitan*). This study of medieval anti-Jewish iconography argues that its proliferation not only reflected the spread of intolerance but in fact actively generated anti-Semitic attitudes. "Jews were given a characteristic physiognomy," Lipton notes, "well before biological racism permeated European thought." She suggests that the true target was less a flesh-and-blood people than a set of ideas against which Christians attempted to define themselves. Depictions of Jews in hats and beards had little to do with Jewish dress at the time; rather, they were a way for Christian artists to symbolically mark Jewish practice as outdated. Although Lipton's analyses of individual art works are rewardingly detailed, they somewhat eclipse a larger historical view of Jewish-Christian relations.




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CHANGE ARTIST

The works of Piero di Cosimo.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

*"The Finding of Vulcan on Lemnos," by the compulsively original Florentine master.*

Are we ready for a five-hundred-and-fifty-three-year-old overnight sensation? The first major retrospective of Piero di Cosimo, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., affords a very long-needed grasp on the strangest master of the Florentine Renaissance. Forty-four paintings, most of them from American and European collections, tell nearly as many stories. The paintings of religious subjects are inventive; those of mythological scenes are outlandish. Born in 1462—ten years after Leonardo and thirteen before Michelangelo—Piero bemused even his contemporaries in Western art's greatest generation. Giorgio Vasari, in the second edition of "Lives of the Artists" (1568), chalked this up to what he had been told of the artist's personality, deciding that "if Piero had not been so abstracted and had paid

more heed to himself in his life than he did, he would have won recognition for the great talent he possessed, in such manner that he would have been adored, whereas through his brutish ways he was rather held to be a madman." (Vasari is known to have embellished the stories in his books, but he is the main source of information on Piero's life.) More telling is Vasari's remark that Piero "changed his style almost from one work to the next." He devoured influences—Leonardo, Filippino Lippi, Flemish painting—and espoused radical ideas, notably a borderline heretical vision of human prehistory as brutally primitive. Compulsively original, he wouldn't hold still to be revered. The glancing ironies and the frequent wild humor of his art remain freshly confounding—and a good deal of fun—today.

Consider "Liberation of Androm-

eda" (circa 1510-13), a single-panel epic from the Uffizi, in Florence. At the left, the semi-nude heroine is tied up by the shore as a sacrifice to an approaching, one-of-a-kind dragon—it looks to have been assembled from monster spare parts, in the dark—as her people lament. But here comes the hero, Perseus, seen first, in the upper right, flying in on winged sandals and then, in the center, atop the creature's back, readying a backhand scimitar stroke to its neck. At the lower right, the people rejoice, as Perseus and Andromeda are betrothed. Now regard another extreme of Piero's range: "Madonna and Child with a Dove" (circa 1490-1500) shows a lovely but rather ordinary young woman in rustic dress, lightly holding a naked, squirming Baby Jesus. He reaches toward a perky white dove, which a faint halo identifies as the Holy Spirit. Vividly realist, the picture is echt Florentine in its strong color and its qualities of *disegno*—drawing as a means of intellectual creation. But its downright humanity is unsurpassed except in Madonnas by the Venetian Giovanni Bellini. It is high poetry in a vernacular vein, a miracle embedded in the everyday. Piero's patrons, in the commercial establishment of Florence, dictated his subjects, but he gave himself over to each as if it were brand new to him.

He was odd, for certain. The son of a toolmaker, and the student of a painter, Cosimo Rosselli, whose name he adopted, Piero seems to have strayed from Florence only once, to assist his teacher on frescoes in Rome. (Piero did no further fresco work, favoring oils on wood, sometimes manipulating them with his fingers.) According to Vasari, he refused to have his house cleaned and subsisted on eggs, which he cooked fifty at a time when he boiled glue. "He could not stand babies crying, men coughing, bells ringing, or friars chanting," Vasari wrote. But he doted on animals, accurately rendering many of them in his work, including a giraffe. (A gift from the Sultan of Egypt to Florence's ruler, Lorenzo de' Medici, the stately creature perished after banging its head on a low doorway.)

Piero could amuse his fellow-

citizens with his knack for seeing things, as when he paused in the street, Vasari writes, “to contemplate a wall at which sick people had for ages been aiming their spittle” and described how he discerned there “battles between horsemen, and the most fantastic cities, and the most extensive landscapes ever seen.” He had his greatest success as a designer of the theatrical productions and processions that Florentines of the time enjoyed on every possible occasion. One of his torch-lit processions featured a “huge chariot drawn by buffaloes,” bearing a figure of Death and surrounded by tombs from which people costumed as skeletons periodically emerged to the sound of muffled trumpets.

According to Vasari, Piero regarded public execution as an enviable way to die—under an open sky, with a big audience. The artist might have had in mind the spectacular hanging and burning, in 1498, of the puritanical reformer Savonarola, whose teachings may have influenced him, though to nothing like the devastating extent that they did his older peer Botticelli, who piously renounced the paganism of his own greatest works and was rumored to have burned some of them. Piero’s most important patron, a wool merchant named Francesco del Pugliese, somehow squared an enthusiasm for Savonarola with a taste for the then lately rediscovered Roman poet-scientist and Epicurean philosopher Lucretius, whose doctrines tilt toward atheism. For Francesco, Piero painted visions of early-human barbarity that are weirder than almost anything in European art at the time south of Hieronymus Bosch. The art historian Erwin Panofsky detected in them no Arcadian nostalgia but the “emotional atavisms” of “a primitive who happened to live in a period of sophisticated civilization,” yet seemed “to have re-experienced the emotions of primeval man.”

The works are *spalliere*—panoramic formats designed to be inset in the wainscoting of rooms—which Francesco commissioned for, of all places, his marital bedroom. “A Hunting Scene,” painted in the fourteen-nineties, finds naked men and satyrs slaughtering animals that they have flushed from a for-

est with a blazing fire. Among the myriad details, there’s a man pulling a bear off a lion that is eating another bear, as a club-wielding satyr aims a deathblow at the lion’s head. (Pleasant dreams, Signor and Signora!) The show’s catalogue quotes W. H. Auden, who was moved by Piero’s bloody caprices to write, in his “Bucolics”:

Sylvan meant savage in those primal woods
Piero di Cosimo so loved to draw,
Where nudes, bears, lions, sows with women’s heads
Mounted and murdered and ate each other raw.


The most uncanny quality of Piero’s art, for me, is the seductive expressiveness of characters who seem neither quite real nor merely imagined. They are like movie actors immersed in juicy roles. The two fancily dressed women smirking at a naked and bewildered young god who has fallen from the sky, in “The Finding of Vulcan on Lemnos,” from the late fourteen-eighties, made me laugh. You know those mean girls at a glance, so skilled and confident is their appearance. Piero’s art is a multitudinous pictorial theatre, at which attendance amounts to complicity. Trying to assess the works in their historical context is hard. They keep spilling into the present tense.

Increasingly eccentric and reclusive, Piero died in 1522, at the age of sixty, probably of plague. One of the last paintings in the show, a Madonna and Child (circa 1515-18), in which the baby plays with a lamb, is soft in focus and sugary in color, akin to the styles of his most renowned students, Andrea del Sarto and Pontormo. It points beyond the High Renaissance to the rising wave of Mannerism. Piero was alert to his changing milieu, even as his production declined. But he wasn’t an artist who developed so much as one who proceeded by continual, sudden shifts, from mode to mode. With an installation that is wonderfully dramatic, rather than chronological, the show’s co-curators, Gretchen A. Hirschauer, of the National Gallery, and Dennis Geronimus, of New York University, maximize the éclat of Piero’s consistent inconsistency. If you see the show, you will come away with a permanent, rowdy new tenant of your mind. ♦

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Robert Kraus, February 7, 1959

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THE THEATRE

BLOOD KNOT

Boy meets vampire.

BY HILTON ALS



There's a lot that's cheap about "Let the Right One In" (at St. Ann's Warehouse), but it's the cheap bits that generate much of the evening's excitement. Based on the unputdownable 2004 book by the prolific Swedish short-story writer John Ajvide Lindqvist—it's his first novel—the gothic tale centers on an adolescent loner named Oskar. The year is 1981, and Oskar lives with his mother in a utilitarian-looking flat in Blackeberg, a suburb of Stockholm. (Oskar's father, largely unknown and unknowable, lives in another part of the city.) In the book, Lindqvist describes the town swiftly: "It was not a place that developed organically, of course. Here everything was

carefully planned from the outset. And people moved into what had been built for them. Earth-colored concrete buildings scattered about in the green fields." Lindqvist passes over Oskar's family background—which is to say, his psychology—just as rapidly, as if afraid that too much explication would undermine his interest in depicting the uncanny, which interests Oskar as well.

Oskar's fascination with the eerie centers, almost exclusively at first, on the kind of violence that can cut through life's baffling mists and mysteries, changing the world in a second. He pores over newspaper articles about unsolved murders, and he's partial to images of hunt-

ing knives. In fact, he keeps a knife under his bed, though he never uses it to harm those who harm him—at school, he's bullied by students and teachers alike. Instead, he enjoys it as a prop in the fantasy that someone will come along to protect him, even if that someone is himself. Like one of those conflicted but self-contained male characters in the Scandinavian master Carl Theodor Dreyer's early silent films, who rifle through their Bibles and look for meaning in controlled spaces, the sensitive Oskar doesn't know that he's friendless because he's pure, unimpeachable. His soul is as white and unblemished as the snow that seems to fall continually in Lindqvist's ever-darkening story, which is thick with murder and inexplicable love.

One night, as Oskar plays alone in a little playground that's adjacent to his home, a girl named Eli suddenly appears on the jungle gym. She's thin and wild-haired, and she looks a little strange to Oskar—as strange as he looks to his classmates and sometimes, even, to his own mother. But there's something more extreme about Eli. First, she's not wearing a coat or shoes, and yet she claims not to be cold. Then, when Oskar, who is all beautiful openness, lends her his Rubik's Cube, she offers an abrupt thank-you and walks off. The moment passes and gets folded into other moments, leading to the revelation that Eli is a vampire, who lives next door to Oskar, with her companion, Håkan, a murderer who drains the blood of his victims so that Eli can be nourished and therefore live, after a fashion. When Håkan bungles a killing and can't feed Eli, she takes advantage of her childlike appearance. (She's ancient but looks to the rest of the world like a teen-ager.) In the forest near her house, she crouches in the snow, whimpering, "Help me, please," to a passing male stranger; when he does, she rips into him as if he were a species of a lower order, to be consumed and forgotten.

The Swedish director Tomas Alfredson, in his perfect 2008 film adaptation of the book—a master class on how to render atmosphere in cinema—turns up the dial on natural sounds (Eli feeding on blood, footsteps crunching in the snow, icicles dripping, a body slipping into a pool of water), as a way of showing us how to hear menace. Alfredson also shows us how love can break through ruthless

Cristian Ortega and Rebecca Benson in a stage adaptation of "Let the Right One In."

self-interest, as the world-weary vampire finds herself more and more drawn to Oskar's natural optimism and concern.

Next to personal, subtle cinema like Alfredson's, stage-bound stories can feel brazen and demanding, like a badly parented child shrieking for attention. John Tiffany, who is the former associate director of the National Theatre of Scotland, also directed "Black Watch" (first staged in New York in 2007), a play about Scottish soldiers in the Iraq War, which won the National Theatre international attention; the musical "Once," for which he won a Tony Award in 2012; and the well-received, if controversial, 2013 Broadway staging of "The Glass Menagerie." Tiffany's admiration for Alfredson's artistry is clear: his production, a collaboration with Steven Hoggett, is, note for note, a variation on the film. But, as a stage creature, he's more vulgar than Alfredson: he feels that his spectacle has to be louder, presumably, to keep us engaged in what is, ultimately, an intimate story.

Christine Jones, who designed the set and the costumes, has filled the stage with tree trunks and snow. Various props—beds, dining tables, the locker room at Oskar's school—are wheeled on and off as needed. (I was reminded of Santo Loquasto's Tony Award-winning set for the director Andrei Șerban's historic 1977 production of "The Cherry Orchard." There, as here, nature loomed over the characters' domestic lives.) The lighting designer, Chahine Yavroyan, credibly illuminates, in half-light, this snowy world, and is as fascinated as we are when blood spills on the frozen ground.

But these subdued elements are outweighed by the "American Horror Story"-like thrills and chills that Tiffany employs throughout the piece, particularly when it comes to sound. First, there's the sound of the actors: the story is now set in a place that Tiffany calls "Scotlandavia"—the script is by the British playwright Jack Thorne—and everyone except Eli (Rebecca Benson) has a brogue. I'm not sure what Tiffany hoped to accomplish by transplanting the story; Lindqvist is sparing with his dialogue, and if the performers had conversed in Swedish (with English supertitles) it would have created an effective distance between the audience and the play, adding to the general strangeness of the proceedings while remaining true to

the story's roots. In another detour from the film, Tiffany uses music, composed by the Icelandic musician Ólafur Arnalds, which seems like a kind of cheat. Of course, Arnalds's dramatic bass-and-drum-heavy style gets you going and makes your pulse jump, but is that necessary? His loud, steady rhythms compete with the actors, instead of carrying them. And when Eli claims her first victim on her own, Gareth Fry, the sound designer, overwhelms the scene with dissonance, as if the sight of a small girl climbing on a grown man and sucking his blood were not dissonant enough. These big gestures—gestures of Tiffany's theatrical intelligence, which I have admired and quarrelled with since I began seeing his work, in 2007—are sensation-alistic and stimulating, but they discredit Lindqvist's unusual text: not satisfied with bringing literature to life, Tiffany feels that he must push and push until we are captivated.

The only actor who fully inhabits Lindqvist's story is the short, square, and unconventional-looking Benson, whose stiff, messy red hair sits on her head like a pile of unlit faggots. Dressed in a nondescript T-shirt and dark trousers for most of the show—appropriate garb for Eli's sleeping chamber, which happens to be a foul-smelling trunk—Benson gives a great performance, because she understands what she's saying and what she must communicate with her body when words are not enough. But where is her Oskar? It's the kind of role that an actor has to inhabit with profound sense memory and flesh out with his own biography, if he has enough critical distance to recognize that its humanness is interesting. Cristian Ortega, as Oskar, is not the boy you dreamed of if you read the book. Under Tiffany's direction, he has become a "likable" character, and his sweetness undermines the seductiveness of Lindqvist's novel; that is, what we fall in love with in the book is Oskar's outsideriness, and the way he accepts it as part of his personality, without too much talk.

Tiffany ends the piece in silence, which is where the future begins for all of us. Oskar is on a train, sitting beside Eli's trunk, communicating with her through the wood in Morse code. The two are as close as they'll ever be—not only to each other but to the people and the phantoms of the world. ♦

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EYES AND EARS

At the Metropolitan Museum, early music in the galleries.

BY ALEX ROSS

*Works by seventeenth-century female composers were performed amid Caravaggios.*

The sixteenth-century art historian Giorgio Vasari describes a picture by Fra Bartolomeo—"The Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine," at the Pitti Palace—in which two child angels are seen playing stringed instruments. One of them, Vasari writes, is a lutenist painted "with a leg drawn up and his instrument resting upon it, and with the hands touching the strings in the act of running over them, an ear intent on the harmony, the head upraised, and the mouth slightly open, in such a way that whoever beholds him cannot persuade himself that he should not also hear the voice."

The idea that music can somehow reverberate from the flat, dumb surface of a painting is a recurring conceit of art history, whether in the angel concerts of the Renaissance or in the abstract syncopation of Mondrian's "Broadway Boogie-Woogie." Likewise, concertgoers have often perceived images in the invisible fabric of sound. As the historian Therese Dolan observes, Charles Baudelaire exhibited

both kinds of synesthesia, listening to paintings by Delacroix ("The admirable chords of his color often make one dream of harmony and melody") and gazing upon the orchestral music of Wagner ("an immense horizon and a wide diffusion of light"). The urge to draw upon another sense is especially strong when an artist takes a turn into new terrain: Schoenberg spoke of "tone-color melody," Kandinsky of visual symphonies emerging from cacophony.

In the past few years, the music series at the Metropolitan Museum, under the imaginative leadership of Limor Tomer, has been stressing the link between sound and image, staging concerts not only in the museum's auditorium but also in the galleries. John Zorn has played sax in front of Jackson Pollock's "Autumn Rhythm"; the Ming Dynasty opera "The Peony Pavilion" has unfolded in Brooke Astor's Chinese garden; and the Grand Tour, a vital new ritual, has hosted early-music ensembles in galleries rel-

evant to their repertory. Last season, the Dark Horse Consort performed music of the Low Countries under the wide, sad, searching eyes of Rembrandt, who seemed ready if not to sing along then to deliver an approving grunt. To hear music in the presence of such masterpieces not only brings out the musical in the visual, and vice versa; it creates imaginary communities in which figures from disparate art forms move into the same plane, dancing in the mind's eye.

The highlight of this season's Grand Tour was a performance by the vocal ensemble TENET, one of the city's liveliest and busiest early-music groups. The setting was Gallery 621, which features Caravaggio and like-minded artists. The room is dominated by sombre classical and religious scenes: the self-flagellation of St. Dominic, by Tarchiani; the Dormition of the Virgin, by Saraceni; a tense exchange between Sts. Peter and Paul, by Ribera; and, most memorable, Caravaggio's naturalistic imagining of Peter's denial of Christ, in which the saint looks befuddled and his accuser triumphant. There are no musical references in this gallery of pictures, at least in its current configuration. (An exhibition in a neighboring gallery, entitled "Painting Music in the Age of Caravaggio," displays Caravaggio's mischievous early canvas "The Musicians," in which a trio of scantily clad neo-Grecian youths tune their instruments and study a score while a Cupid figure busies himself with a bunch of grapes.) Instead, the music of Gallery 621 is largely one of color: the red of Paul's tunic, in the Ribera, emerges from a dark background like a tone from silence.

Members of TENET—the sopranos Jolle Greenleaf and Molly Quinn, the mezzo Virginia Warnken, the viola da gamba player Joshua Lee, the theorbo and guitar player Hank Heijink, and the harpsichordist Jeffrey Grossman—offered exuberant, subversive counterpoint to the prevailing gloom. The program included three pieces by female composers of the seventeenth century: Francesca Caccini, the daughter of Giulio Caccini, one of the pioneers of the opera genre; and Barbara Strozzi, whose adoptive father, the poet Giulio Strozzi,

collaborated with several early opera composers. The two women managed to carve out distinct identities within a nearly all-male composing culture, their finest arias rivalling those of Monteverdi and Cavalli. The Met's galleries are also a male-dominated realm, and TENET seemed to be giving sly voice to all the silent Madonnas on the museum's walls.

Strozzi, a remarkably prolific and well-documented composer who moved in lofty intellectual circles in Venice, was represented by "Amor dormiglione," in which the singer berates Cupid for sleeping through hours that could have been dedicated to lovemaking. Vasari once explained that painters show Cupid in the vicinity of musicians because "Love is always in the company of Music"; Strozzi's piece could almost be an ironic commentary on that familiar configuration, with the eager lover in distress because the fuel of music is running low. Greenleaf, who is the leader of TENET and also coördinated the Grand Tour project, sang in a crisp, sensuous voice, and, in an amusing bit of theatre, tugged at Heijink's sleeve as she complained of wasted time. I only wish that we could have heard, by way of contrast, one of Strozzi's stately, high-minded laments, such as "Lagrima mie" or "L'Eraclito amoroso." But the Grand Tour ensembles were on a tight schedule, and had about twenty minutes each.

TENET then turned to Caccini, who spent much of her career in the service of the Medici. The canzonetta "Chi desia di saper" has words by Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, the art-

ist's grand-nephew: over a bouncy beat strummed out on a Spanish guitar (as Caccini's score requests), the singer cheekily proclaims that love is nothing but pain, fear, and fury. Quinn, the soloist, accentuated the pop flavor with handclaps and tasteful gyrations. Warnken, a bright-voiced mezzo, then delivered a richly ornamented rendition of Caccini's "Dispiegate guancie amate," a melancholy, sinuous song of seduction. The ornaments in the first verse were, in fact, Caccini's own; a singer of rare finesse, she was as precise in her instructions as notation of the period allowed. The program also included two arias by Luigi Rossi and a "Passacalli della Vita," or "Passacaglia of Life," by an anonymous seventeenth-century composer. The last made for a rollicking, foot-tapping finale, with the singers strutting about, arm in arm. I would happily have followed them around the museum for another couple of hours. (Fortunately, TENET is expanding this material into an evening-length entertainment, titled "The Secret Lover," which celebrates the crucial contributions that women made to the emergence of opera. Before the début of the full program, in April, at the Edith Fabbri Mansion, on East Ninety-fifth Street, the group will delve into the profound male woe of Bach's St. Matthew Passion and Gesualdo's *Tenebrae Responsoria*.)

Other participants in the Grand Tour included Ensemble Viscera, performing Spanish and Italian lute-and-guitar pieces in an El Greco gallery; the harpsichordist Michael Sponseller, playing mostly eighteenth-century

works, including the London-based composers J. C. Bach and Carl Friedrich Abel, amid English paintings of the same period; and the wind band Ciamarella, presenting Dutch fare in the vicinity of landscapes and maritime scenes by the likes of Aelbert Cuyp and Philips Koninck. None found quite as deft a fit as TENET did in the Caravaggio room: Ensemble Viscera's gentle vamps couldn't compete with the flamboyant mysticism of El Greco, and Ciamarella's reedy din, which included bagpipes and shawms, seemed to overpower the Dutch artists' calm seas and drifting clouds. Still, each mini-concert brought unexpected epiphanies—Ciamarella made you think about all the noise and bustle that can't be perceived in paintings of rustic scenes—and together the performances provided a vivid cross-section of current early-music practice, which tends to prize tangy timbres and springy rhythms.

Throughout the evening, I couldn't escape the uncanny feeling that the people in the paintings were listening in, as in some spooky Victorian tale of portraits come to life. In the presence of the music, their eyes possibly glowed a little brighter, their flesh a little warmer. In Gallery 621, the effect was all but electric: chaste religious figures seemed on the verge of jumping out of the chiaroscuro shadows and joining the women of TENET, who, in turn, looked ready to step through the frames into the other world. Then, with the applause, the spell was broken: the living walked away, and the pictures fell silent for the night. ♦

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by John Klossner, must be received by Sunday, February 8th. The finalists in the January 26th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the February 23rd & March 2nd issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"So, where do you see yourself in five thousand years?"
Patricia Barroll Sellman, San Francisco, Calif.



THE FINALISTS

"We have to stop eating the seed money."
Stephanie Goodman, Superior, Colo.

"Can we talk?"
Larry Tobacman, Burr Ridge, Ill.

"Don't repeat this."
Lynne Smilow, South Orange, N.J.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“

”

FOR SEASON TWO HE'S CHANGING IT ALL UP.

(Actually, it's basically the same.
Ignore the pony.)

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